

Urbanisation and the Transformation of Chinese Women's Sport in Post-Mao Era

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A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted to the School of Education and Contemporary Studies in

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of De Montfort University

April 2006

ABSTRACT

Urbanisation and the Transformation of Chinese Women's Sport in the Post-Mao Era

Since the 1980s, the Chinese market economy has taken the place of a planned economy and led China into a new era of urbanisation. Chinese women have been influenced by urbanisation both comprehensively and thoroughly. To Chinese women, urbanisation is an opportunity and a challenge, to change economically, politically and culturally. Research on women's participation in sport is a direct way to mirror Chinese women's situations in a changing society. On this basis, this thesis aims to explore the contributions of urbanisation to social development and to women's participation in sport; the change of women's status during urbanisation and its influences on the stratification of women's sports participation; the conflict of the Western culture and the traditional Chinese culture in the urban society and its impacts on women's emancipation, self-realisation and gender equality in sport.

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Chinese women's sport has evolved under very complex social, cultural and political circumstances. However, the emphasis on the political function of women's sport on the international stage has not really brought the emancipation of women from the male-dominated society. Since the new era of urbanisation in the 1980s (Post-Mao era), Chinese women's participation has acquired new characteristics along with the transformation of the sports system and the changes of women's roles in cities. The changes in sports formations, sports functions and sports values have interacted with each other, providing a social access for women to participate in sport individually and independently. Meanwhile, women's social roles and their different ways of life have led to the stratification of women's sports activities (Yan, 2003). Moreover, women's participation in sports has grown alongside the conflicts between traditional and modern cultures in cities, which to a certain extent have confused Chinese women and restricted them from being fully involved in sport.

In summary, on the one hand urbanisation has created a new economic, political and cultural environment for Chinese women to choose their own lifestyles; on the other hand this social transformation also brought big challenges and barriers to Chinese women's development. Gender inequality still exists in China, but in a more complicated and subtle way. This also reflects on the transformation of Chinese women's sport.

Key words: China, Urbanisation, Women, Sports Participation, Transformation, Stratification and Body Image.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Fan Hong for her time, expert advice and direction she has provided throughout the course of the doctorate study. I would also like to express my gratitude to my second supervisor, Dr Keith Sharp, for his guidance.

I would also like to express my appreciation to all the staff and fellow researcher students in Bedford Faculty of De Montfort University for their support and encouragement. In particular, I am deeply grateful to Dr David Wilcockson for his kindly help with my English language.

I am also grateful to the past and present staff in China General Administration of Sport, Beijing Chongwen Sports Department, Mianyang Fucheng Sports Department, All-China Federation of Women and Chinese Academy of Social Science for their time and assistance to this research. In particular, I am grateful to all those individuals interviewed, for their time and willingness to participate in this study. This thesis could not have progressed without their full cooperation.

The most profound thanks go to my father Xiong Xiaozheng, Professor of Beijing Sports University. Without his initial inspiration and continual help in locating valuable sources and research access, this research could not be completed. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to my mother Yan Shichuan, for her love, encouragement and support throughout the period of my study in the UK. Special thanks also go to Andy Zhao, who has given me much needed assistance, encouragement and support in so many ways during the completion of the thesis.

Thank you one and all.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

ACWF:	All-China Women’s Federation
BSB:	Beijing Statistic Bureau
CASS:	China Academy of Social Science
CCP:	Chinese Communist Party
CGAS:	China General Administration of Sport
CMIC:	Cadre Management Institute of China
COC:	Chinese Olympic Committee
CPIC:	China Population Information Centre
CSB:	Chinese Statistical Bureau
CSHPES:	Chinese Society for History of Physical Education and Sport
GLF:	Great Leap Forward
IRCMS:	Investigation and Research on Chinese Mass Sport
IRCMS II:	Second Investigation and Research on Chinese Mass Sport
MSMD:	Mass Sport Management Department of the CGAS
NSB:	National Statistic Bureau
NSC:	National Sports Commission
PLA:	People’s Liberation Army
PRC:	People’s Republic of China
PRI:	Population Research Institute
USWC:	Urban Sports Work Conference

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Since the 1980s a great economic reform has been launched in China. Chinese people have opened their minds and embarked on a brand-new course of constructing a new country. This great reform has brought fresh air to a long-closed society, leading China towards urbanisation. This urbanisation has also influenced Chinese women economically, culturally and politically, and has directly impacted on women's sport in contemporary China. In general, Chinese women's participation in sport has developed under extremely complex and unique social, cultural and political circumstances, which constitute an important social phenomenon in the context of women's studies and Chinese studies. The aims of this study are to explore the contributions of urbanisation to social development and to women's participation in sport; the change of women's status during urbanisation and its influence on the stratification of women's sports participation; the conflict of Western culture and the traditional Chinese culture in the urban society and its impact on women's emancipation, self-realisation and gender equality in sport.

1.2 Urbanisation and Chinese Society

Urbanisation was one of the most significant processes affecting human societies in the twentieth century (Potter and Lloyd-Evans, 1998). Until recent times, urbanisation was almost universally seen as a direct indication of modernisation, development and economic growth (Potter and Lloyd-Evans, 1998). It is a process through which populations become concentrated in large communities – cities that are essentially non-agricultural in character. Instead, 'they are organised primarily around the production of services and finished goods' (Johnson, 1995: 336). Urbanisation is a

necessary consequence of the economic development of society, one which has taken place when the economic, social and environmental circumstances of urban areas have stimulated calls for reform, ever since the Industrial Revolution brought large masses of people to live within cities (Fainstein and Campbell, 1996). Cities are not only centres for transforming raw materials into manufactured goods, for transporting and making these goods both intranationally and internationally (Meadows and Mizruchi, 1969) but also organic entities comprising spatial dimensions, governments and laws, neighbourhoods, social classes, ethnic groups, voluntary organisations, communication and transportation networks, value systems and public behaviour which have interacted over time to create a city life (Riess, 1989). Urbanisation transforms societies by fundamentally changing not only where people live but also how they live (Slattery, 1985). For society urbanisation is a complex process with a continuous interaction of social elements, while for individuals urbanisation offers new lifestyles and different values when they move into cities. Before 1850 no society could be described as predominantly urbanised, and by 1900 only one – Great Britain – could be so regarded. Today, all industrial nations are highly urbanised, and in the world as a whole the process of urbanisation is progressing rapidly (Slattery, 1985). The world is currently experiencing an entirely new era of urbanisation and is increasingly becoming an urban world (Paddison, 2001).

Since the 1980s, the Chinese market economy has been taking the place of the planned economy. The transformation of the economic system has changed every aspect of Chinese society, leading it to a new way of urbanisation. For China, urbanisation is a prerequisite for social development, leading Chinese society from traditional values to a modern, global and international society. However, the process of Chinese urbanisation has been very tortuous as a result of a complicated historical and political background. Since the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established in 1949, there appeared a strange phenomenon in which China's industrialisation developed rapidly without a parallel growth of urban population (Kirkby, 1988), which was reflected by the pervasiveness of anti-urbanism in every aspect of Chinese society. Since the 1980s, facing powerful world pressures externally and economic forces internally, the Chinese government accepted that urbanisation was a law in the development of a commodity economy, and was a trend that could not be avoided (Kirkby, 1988). This new perspective accelerated the process of

urbanisation in China, making a profound impact on Chinese society. The Chinese government played an important role in the development of urbanisation, because it could not ignore that this target was based on economic, social and cultural factors and individuals' requirements. The forces of the market economy, social needs and governmental strategy encouraged the reconstruction of old urban areas and the rise of new modern cities. Therefore real Chinese urbanisation took off in the early 1980s.

Chinese urbanisation had both elements common to global urbanisation and its own particular characteristics. Chinese urbanisation, like the experiences of Western countries, was associated with a process of industrialisation and economic change. A steady increase in the demand for labour occurred in the towns and cities, whilst at the same time technical developments in agriculture allowed for a declining rural population. Labour surplus in rural areas migrated rapidly towards towns and cities, which accelerated the process of urbanisation. In considering the specific characteristics of Chinese urbanisation, first, it should be made clear that urban expansion in Chinese society was a combination of bottom-up and top-down transformation, from a traditional society to a modern nation. It was naturally a bottom-up process generated by the market economy. Since the market economy has been gradually permeating Chinese society, it has speeded the rise of the Chinese economy and accelerated the process of urbanisation in Chinese society. Meanwhile, market-based mechanisms have stimulated an increase in the requirements for change within social environments for the promotion of individuals as well as their living conditions. Once the Central Government of China has become involved in setting targets and plans to control the process of urbanisation in China, urbanisation had become a top-down process. Second, urbanisation in contemporary China could be regarded as a two-level process. It included the direct transformation of rural areas into urban areas that is the rise of new small cities or small towns, and the reconstruction and redevelopment of urban areas. This process was created by the government's policy of urbanisation. In the early 1980s, when the government became aware of the process of urbanisation in relation to Chinese development, it emphasised that the key strategy was small-town-based urbanisation. At a major conference on the urbanisation question held in Nanjing in 1984, one distinct position was expressed that small towns should be allowed to develop. It was stated that the process of urbanisation to small towns was natural, and should reflect the whole

transformation of China's social structure from rural to urban since 1980, whereas, after the re-evaluation of the Chinese road to urbanisation in the 1990s, many spatial planners advised that the development of larger classes of city should be fostered, and small rural townships could only be granted selective attention because of the weakness of their economic base. This method of planned urbanisation was predominantly based on economic viability (Kirkby, 1988). These two processes were both essential for Chinese development. The emergence of the small town was a typical process of social transformation from rural to urban in China. It was the direction of rural society, increasing rural residents' living quality. Urbanisation for China also was the process of urban development, which has become an urgent issue, being given increasing attention by most Chinese cities. Urban development was mainly manifested through the sustainable modernisation of cities, which aimed to give citizens economic, social and environmental benefits.

Urbanisation as a process of systematic transformation in contemporary Chinese society provides a comprehensive background for analysing any social phenomena in China. Studies of Chinese urbanisation have increased since the 1980s. However, most of these studies have either concentrated on exploring economic rules or have discussed urbanisation as a geographic and demographic transformation. In this study, urbanisation is seen not only as an economic process in geographic and demographic terms, but is also recognised as a change in the individual and social 'way of life'. The massive shift of population from the countryside to towns and cities has fundamentally changed not only the character and structure of society but the very environment in which we live – not only our relationship with other people, but our whole 'way of life' (Slattery, 1985). This concept of urbanisation as a 'way of life' was first described by American sociologist Louis Wirth (1890–1952) in his deductive theoretical essay 'Urbanism as a Way of Life' (*American Journal of Sociology* 44, pp. 1–24, 1938). He codified the prevailing thought of European social theories and earlier members of the Chicago school of sociology on the psychological and behavioural consequences of living in cities. In Wirth's view, the ecological and demographic structure of city life produced numerous social and social-psychological consequences. Wirth held that these consequences taken together constituted a new pattern of culture, a 'way of life' which he named 'urbanism' (Smith, 1980). He argued that urban environments produced a particular kind of social life in cities,

which tended to be more anonymous and based on formal relationships and a complex division of labour within a heterogeneous population (Johnson, 1995).

Chinese society was experiencing the change of a 'way of life', namely an urban pattern of culture. It was a pattern of existence that involved market economic mechanisms, tendencies towards a city-based, centralised governmental structure and the interplay between innovation and change against the maintenance of societal traditions (Meadows and Mizruchi, 1969). New patterns of social life brought a specialised division of labour, the growth of instrumentalism in social relationships, the weakening of kin relationships, changes in gender relationships, the growth of voluntary associations, a normative pluralism, an increase in social conflicts and the growing importance of the mass media (Marshall, 1998). Chinese people's lifestyles were gradually changing in this process, which in turn impacted on the cultural environment of the whole society. The transformation of the cultural system brought the Chinese people new social values and got them involved in multiple selections for their own lives. In summary, as a developing country, urbanisation was a prerequisite for Chinese modernisation. The transition from a rural to an urban society mirrored the transformation of China from traditional to modern in terms of not only technologies of production but also the orientation of individuals, social institutions and cultural concepts – which, in turn, have created a new gender system in China.

1.3 Chinese Women and Urbanisation

The new era of Chinese urbanisation created by economic reform and the open-door policy was a historical turning point for Chinese society. In the face of powerful economic and social forces that were producing unprecedented changes, China summoned all the power of custom, religion and science at its disposal in defence of the status quo (Sun, 2003). Chinese women, half of the population, have been influenced by urbanisation comprehensively and thoroughly. To Chinese women, urbanisation was an opportunity as well as a challenge to change economically, politically and culturally. What kinds of changes did urbanisation bring to Chinese women? Were the changes to the situation of women during the process of urbanisation norms of development and progress or limitation and inequality? How

could we evaluate this social transformation to modernity and its great impact on the changes to the identity and social status of Chinese women?

In order to clarify the changes to the status of women in the process of urbanisation, above all, we need to generally review the situation of Chinese women from a historical standpoint. For nearly two thousand years, Chinese society maintained a rural pattern. Family-based agricultural farming was the dominant form of productivity (Fei, 1992 and 1998). The Chinese family constituted the nucleus of the social network, and the father of the family owned and controlled the family enterprise (Hong, 1997; Henry, 1967). Based on the economic foundation of the agricultural family, Chinese society was profoundly and comprehensively controlled by rural culture, which existed by centring itself on the concepts of patriarchal power, the core of Confucianism (Fei, 1998). Confucianism was the cultural philosophy of rural life, and provided the political, social and moral foundation of Chinese society. It had sustained an inflexible social hierarchy, ensuring the male's dominant status in society. In this cultural system, Chinese women had to 'obey the father when at home, submit to the husband when married, and listen to the son after the husband dies' (Hong, 1997). They were economically dependent and were excluded from political and social life. They had no independent legal status and were denied rights to education, inheritance and choice in marriage. From the cultural aspect, Chinese women had lived with Confucian law daily prescribing correct thought, proper behaviour and a submissive image, defining female qualities in terms of the male (Li, 1986). Owing to their economic-political dependency and cultural constraints derived from the rural system, Chinese women were not able to build up their own self-identity as social individuals and had no consciousness to strive for equality with men. Most Chinese women tended to see themselves as attachments of their father, husband and son and to accept the inequalities inherent in society (Jaschok and Miers, 1994).

Chinese women suffered a long history of oppression and their situation did not significantly change until the establishment of the PRC. When Mao Zedong (1893–1976) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) gained power in 1949, the lives of women in China underwent dramatic changes. Mao formulated the official position on women in the PRC by using Engels' theory on the relationship between women's equality and the class struggle which stated, in brief, that the degree of women's

emancipation was a natural measure of general emancipation (Li et al., 1992). Women were encouraged to participate in waged labour and act like men. Equality between men and women became official state policy as a representation of the success of communism. In both rhetorical and practical terms, women were invited to assume male qualities and enter male spaces (Croll, 1983). We cannot deny that in Maoist society women achieved some equality in status with men. The state granted women financial independence by encouraging them to enter the workforce in large numbers and bestowed upon them equal rights in politics by encouraging them to engage in public affairs. However, there was also an 'erasure of gender' in the new society which played down gender difference and gender identity, specifically female (Yang, 1999). As a result, women's collective gender identity, women's culture and the development of a feminist consciousness were blocked by the dominant male discourse of class and loyalty to the state (Croll, 1995). Women still had not broken away from the role designed by masculine society.

Following the end of Mao's era and the implementation of economic reform, China has entered a new era of urbanisation. This social transformation has brought women unprecedented new opportunities, choices and expectations alongside increased discrimination, limitation and disappointment. The overall aim of the economic reform of the past twenty years has been to transform China rapidly into a powerful and modern nation-state by reforming and developing all sectors of the economy, establishing a balance between plan and market, production and consumption and public and private forms of resource allocation (Wei and Wang, 1997). To this end, policy programmes have emphasised the importance of education, professionalism, skills, scientific and technical knowledge, profitability, the operation of economic incentives and the demands and interests of the consumer (Croll, 1995). Meanwhile, market mechanisms represent competition, choice, mobility and incipient civil society for individuals. All these social changes have provided a relatively equal competitive arena, compelling some women to rely on their own ability, courage and insight to become policy-makers and managers (Gilmartin, 1994). Hence, to a certain extent, urban reform could create opportunities for women to explore the potential in their careers and could supply a comparatively fair atmosphere for them to compete with men. Furthermore, urbanisation for Chinese women has been a distinct process of cultural transformation. It has brought Chinese women a new multi-cultural

environment in which to choose their own lifestyles and form new identities. Now, Chinese women's self-identity has become associated with lifestyle rather than class labels. Chinese women, especially the new generation that has grown up in the reformation era, are perceived as more independent and not have to sacrifice themselves for socialism, the state, the collectives, the family, husband or children. Their self-strengthening has become an important platform. Chinese women are now aware that they are searching for an independence of personality and spirit. However, this has not been an easy process. When Chinese women began consciously to seek equal status, realising their independent roles in social institutions and constructing their self-identity through an image of the female body, they met enormous challenges, barriers and confusion and reached unexpected situations. Many Chinese women felt alienated by the rift between the rhetoric of the equality of the sexes and the day-to-day reality (Croll, 1995; Chen, 1992), and felt that challenges and crises were inevitable (Croll, 1995; Jiang, 2001).

The most stern and actual challenge faced by Chinese women was being 'laid off' (Jin, 2001; Li, 1994). In urban areas, life tenure for workers, or the 'iron rice bowl' policy, ended in many industries, meaning those workers could lose their jobs. With the logic of productivity and profit now guiding the workplace, women workers were often the first people to bear the brunt of economic reform. Many employers argued that women, as childbearers, were an economic liability. They required more leave time and, as such, were seen as less efficient. Many individuals, both men and women, argued that women should return to the home to clear the way for men's employment – in other words, remove themselves to help with surplus labour problems. Other women, whose families prospered from economic development, returned to the home 'voluntarily', exhausted by the double burden of paid employment and an unequal division of labour in the home (Zhao, 2001). In the rural areas, communal farming ended, with the nuclear family being designated as the primary economic unit. In these rural areas small industries developed on the side. Men were the main labour in these factories. Yet women became ghettoised in low-paid agricultural work (Jin, 2001).

Another challenge for women was how to rebuild female identity during the transformation of social and cultural systems. Many women felt themselves to be

caught within a plurality of expectations originating from a variety of sources including state, family and men, with the result that the identification of 'proper' or 'appropriate' female behaviour and priorities seems difficult in the absence of a single rhetoric defining proper female needs and interests appropriate to a modern woman (Croll, 1995). Women's confusion and tension caused by the complexity of life choices and the dilemmas and problems of everyday life attract discussions centring on the conflicts between the socially approved qualities of virtuous wives and good mothers and the ideal of the newly independent modern women.

This confusion is the prevalent theme not only in present-day representations of women's discourse but also in the image of the female body. The most significant change in this period has been the separation out of the female image from the previous generalised definition of comrade or man and the rejection of the revolutionary 'masculinisation of female', 'female man' or 'superwoman's masculinisation' (Croll, 1995). The emphasis on gender distinction and difference has grown, marked by new interests in the image of the feminine, focusing first on physical appearance (Hoing and Gail, 1988). Thus shaping the Chinese female body is the way to rebuild women's self-identity and reconstruct women's status in the new society, because the body is 'constant in a rapidly changing world, the source of fundamental truths about who we are and how society is organised' (Frank, 1990: 131). The liberation of female bodies is an essential requirement for their wider physical, social, cultural, economic and political freedom (Hong, 1997), which is a stern challenge facing Chinese women themselves as well as the subject of women's studies in China.

1.4 Women and Sport

It was largely feminists who put the body on the intellectual map (Hong, 2001a: 1). Female bodies had always been the subject of numerous empirical studies, from reproductive control and postnatal depression to anorexia nervosa and menopause (Mangan and Hong, 2001), while Park (1978) stated that modern women's emancipation was intimately bound up with their athletic ability – and certainly with their physicality (Park, 1978; Mangan and Hong, 2001). Sport, as a means of

maintaining, shaping and transmitting bodily images and moral values, has systematically presented standards for evaluating women's situation in the transformation of society. For women, 'sport, recreation and leisure were sources of pleasure, an instrument of control or symbol of emancipation' (Mangan and Park, 1994: 3). The female body in sport has been a location for debate about the changing nature of ideology, power, social structures and cultural systems (Mangan and Hong, 2001). Women's involvement in sport has been a necessary way for them to rebuild their body image, self-identity and social status, and eventually liberate them from patriarchal society. The process of exploring the relationship between sport and women would reflect physical and social concerns about the female body, the debatable focus between essentialism and constructivism. In addition, the relations between women and sport might mirror cultural concepts about femininity and masculinity, which stimulate the conflict between the trend of modern culture and traditional culture. Moreover, on the psychological level, it could embody women's self-fulfilment and self-identity; on the political level, it means women's emancipation and liberation. Sport has not only mirrored the situation of women in present-day society, but has also been a 'dynamic cultural product' (Costa and Guthrie, 1994: 234) actively creating and recreating the image of the female body and forming new gender relations during social transformation.

Since the late nineteenth century, sport as a social institution and modern product has been regarded as a powerful weapon for feminists against patriarchy. The growth of interest in women's studies has led to a proliferation of sociological studies dealing with the issues of women's rights, women's role and gender relationships with a feminist perspective (Mangan and Park, 1987). At the same time, some feminists have shown an increasing interest in the role of women's sport. The relationship between modern female exercise and emancipation has been scrutinised by academics in Britain and America (Hong, 1997).

First, sport feminists have argued that there was a direct relationship between women's acceptance in sports and in other social situations. 'Sport gave women an opportunity to be physically active, to be mobile, to be vigorous and hardy, and to compete ... to try almost everything with a reasonable hope of succeeding' (McCrone, 1987: 120).

Second, they have seen the female body as the focus for women's participation in sport. They have claimed that the female body is a socially but not a biologically constructed form. 'While men and women were born with certain features, their shaping and assessment was a consequence of social and historical conditions' (Vertinsky, 1987: 263). Woman was born as a woman, but reborn by the society. In Western academia, many embodied theories have become powerful instruments in the fight for women's participation in sport and equality in sport.

Third, sports feminists have explored the relationship between women's role in society and their participation in sport. They have argued that the role of Western women, before the Victorian era, was defined largely by their childbearing capacity and their status was derived from that of male relatives (McCrone, 1987). Women's reproduction and their strong role in domestic issues limited their opportunities to participate in sport. Although in the late nineteenth century, the transformation of Western society meant that women were encouraged to become involved in sport, the main purpose was to ensure a healthy future generation. Women's involvement in sport played a more important role as a social function rather than for the benefit of women themselves. Thus for women, sport had been an instrument both of distinctive but confused identity and of subordination and liberation (Mangan and Park, 1987).

In conclusion, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sport in Western countries served as a vehicle for debating gender differences and fighting for women's equality. These feminist perspectives can illuminate an analysis of Chinese women's participation in sport. Some of their analytical perspectives can be applied to Chinese studies: for example, the relation between women's social role and women's requirement for exercise, the image of the female body and their expected body shape in women's sport. However, in the specific context of Chinese culture and history, the relationship between women and sport appears to have different characteristics.

Women's issues have attracted much attention in Chinese academia since the 1980s. Between 1980 and 1990, Chinese women's studies have mainly focused on the relationship between the Chinese revolution and women's liberation. After 1990, Chinese academia paid much more attention to the subjects of reproductive plans, gender relations in the law, family violence, women's literature and creative works, the changes of women's identity, rural women in the economic reform, sex discourse

and sexuality and its relevance to modernity (Jin and Liu, 1998). However, there has been no specific study on Chinese women and the female body from the sport perspective. To review the modern history of Chinese women, sport and exercise has contributed to Chinese women's movements and their social status profoundly and universally. In feudal societies, Chinese women suffered a long history of oppression. It was originally reflected by the restrictions on the female body: specifically footbinding. Footbinding was a physical tyranny and social constraint on Chinese women from ancient to modern times. It represented male domination and power by controlling the female body physically and mentally (Hong, 1997). The emancipation of Chinese women's bodies between 1840 and 1949 has shown years of gradual liberation from the harsh oppression of previous centuries and indicates that physical emancipation, particularly in the context of the custom of footbinding, has been the prerequisite for wider emancipation, because 'without normal limbs, un-mutilated extremities and unrestricted movement there was little possibility of physical and psychological health, educational access, occupational opportunity and political assertion. More than this, without access to modern exercise there were distinctly reduced possibilities of personal pleasure, self-realisation, self-fulfilment, social status and gender enhancement' (Hong, 1997: xiv).

Since 1949, when Communist China was founded, Chinese women were completely emancipated from the physical tyranny of footbinding and encouraged to build masculine bodies, which were considered more egalitarian and homogeneous. The female sporting body was a very special location for creating women's 'iron bodies' and 'masculine images'. It served to transform the image of Chinese women from physical weakness to a powerful body, eventually achieving the aim of breaking the gender boundary. It was also treated as an effective instrument to build an independent image of the new socialist country around the world. For these reasons women's participation in sport was highly promoted and Chinese women's sport achieved significantly in a very short time. Especially, the extraordinary performance of Chinese elite women in the international sports arena 'thrust Chinese sportswomen into the global limelight and sparked considerable interest around the world' (Dong, 2003: 1). Whether in theory or in practice, sport and exercise played a very important role in the sudden rise to prominence of Chinese women.

However, the practical history of women's emancipation in China through participation in sport has been much more complicated than in theory. It encounters specifically social complexities, including the domestic and passive transformation of the economic system, the collapse and preservation of traditional culture from the influence of Western ideology. Chinese women's emancipation from footbinding was the first step towards the emancipation of the female body from patriarchal culture. The Communist model of women's participation in sport, which attempted to rebuild the female body with androgynous ideology, was the second step. Participation in sport and exercise was one of the effective ways to emancipate the female body and to enable women to fulfil themselves in the physical, psychological and cultural senses. However, it needed certain economic, political and cultural conditions to stimulate it. That is my motive for investigating the new way of urbanisation in contemporary China: to look at whether rising social conditions could encourage women to go a step further to gain real equality in the sports arena and free their bodies physically and culturally.

1.5 Urbanisation and Women's Sport in China

'The city is the centre of modern progress' (Slattery, 1985: viii). Cities are the focal point of modern economies, the homes of major corporations and financial institutions, the powerhouses of modern politics, the centres of government, centres of law and order, and the cultural centres of the modern world (Slattery, 1985). Cities are organic entities that create great changes in society. As for sport, the city is the geographic unit with the spatial dimension and large residential populations that provides sports fields, sports facilities, potential players and spectators. In addition, the city is an institutional unit, where sport becomes rationalised, specialised, organised, commercialised and professionalised. Moreover, the city is a cultural unit, where sports culture and values are recreated and involved in urban culture as lifestyles and public behaviours (Riess, 1989). In conclusion, urban changes directly influence sports culture and institutions which impact on certain aspects of city development, which in turn shapes sport.

Chinese sport has been changing since the beginning of urbanisation. Elements of urbanisation – physical structure, social organisations and value systems – have interacted with each other and affected Chinese sports institutions and culture. Before the 1980s, Chinese sport focused on political and military purposes rather than on social discourse. Chinese sport as a political instrument and a diplomatic resource was extremely valuable for the Communists, who claimed credit for helping China reconstruct and transform its internal and external social image for the better after 1949 (Hong and Xiong, 2002). At the same time, sport for the grassroots was a military means of keeping the Chinese people fit and training them to be strong soldiers (Hong and Tan, 2003). Its political purpose and military meanings suppressed sport for entertainment, individual self-fulfilment, individual self-expression and personal self-promotion.

In the process of urbanisation and globalisation since the 1980s, Chinese sport has been playing more complex roles for society and the individuals. It has combined nationalism, commercialism and individualism. Clearly, the concept of sport as a ‘way of life’ has gradually been taking the place of that of sport as a political tool. Chinese people’s participation in sport has become a matter of individual choice rather than organised behaviour. The slogan ‘Sport For All’ (State Council and Chinese Olympic Committee (COC), 1995) was promoted by the Chinese government and was gradually accepted by the Chinese people. It implied that the Chinese people have become aware that sport, as physical exercise, aims to build their healthy bodies and spirits; entertain and fulfil them; and eventually speed up the civilisation process for the whole society (Investigation and Research of China’s Mass Sport (IRCMS), 1998).

Chinese women’s sport had developed since 1949. As an important part of ‘Communist sport’ (Hong and Xiong, 2002), Chinese elite women won a great reputation and brought the PRC political and diplomatic capital to rebuild a new image in the world. The distinguished achievements of Chinese athletic women in the sports arena gave Chinese women the opportunity to develop equality with men. It was a landmark in women’s history in China. The slogan ‘women can hold up half of the sky’ seemed to free women, at least in the field of sport. We cannot ignore women’s victories in competitive sport since 1949. However, it cannot serve as a

yardstick to prove that Chinese women have been totally liberated and have won equality with men through sport in Chinese society. Behind the dazzling medals of female athletes, there existed male power. This was because Chinese women's success was not naturally generated by society's system of gender equality but was produced by the political functioning of the country's unique sports system. The emphasis on the political function of women's sport on the international stage developed an imbalance between elite sport and mass sport. It caused a contradiction in that although female athletes had won success on the international stage, women's physical activity at the grassroots was still at a low level. It could be reflected in the inadequate facilities, instructors and funding for women's physical activity and sport, the documented ignorance of women and the low rate of women's participation in sport (IRCMS, 1998). In summary, based on the reality of gender relations in Chinese society during the period of the Communist revolution (1949–1979), female athletes' achievements on the international sports stage could not demonstrate that women had gained complete equality in physical activity and sport.

Chinese women have been the most sensitive group affected by urbanisation (Zhang, 2003: 306–335). Under the process of urbanisation since the 1980s, Chinese women's participation in sport has comprehensively and profoundly changed. Women's mass sport was developed with enthusiasm, but it was thoroughly affected by, first, the changes to the sport system in China; second, the changes of women's status in the new era; and third, the assimilations and conflicts between traditional and modern cultures.

The changes in Chinese women's sports participation have been the result of the transformation of the Chinese sport system. In the new era of urbanisation, the rise of cities, with the expansion of their functions, stimulated changes in sports formation, sports function and sports values, which interacted with each other and provided social access for women participating in sport individually and independently. First, since the economic reform and the open-door policy were implemented, Chinese sports institutions have been gradually released from government control and returned to society. Influenced by market economic forces and modern sports inflow, Chinese sport has appeared in different formations. The increase of gym sport, park sport, community sport and some voluntary sports organisations have given women more

access to involvement in sport at the grassroots. That has been the prerequisite for women to participate in sport extensively. Second, in urbanisation, sport has extended its economic and social functions alongside its strong political function. Sport now was treated as an industry which was regularly driven by market forces. Women as huge consumers in Chinese cities were certainly taken into account by sports businesses. In addition, sport's social function as a communicative setting deeply influenced the social life of women. It gave women more opportunities to enter public spaces and to associate with each other. Third, as a cultural phenomenon and social value, sport shapes fashion, beauty, health and power, the things which women pursue. The boom in luxury female fitness clubs, women's body shaping courses in cities and a variety of sports costumes were the evidence. As a result, the value of sports has been changing. The idea of 'Sport for All' conceptualised sport's new value, which replaced the idea that sport should be a hard activity to 'build strong soldiers for the sake of China' (Hong and Tan, 2003: 204). Chinese women began to regard sport as a vivid living way to entertain people and make their lives rich and varied. For them, sport was not only a source of pleasure but also a means of self-realisation and body liberation. It was a powerful instrument for women to weaken male control in Chinese society. Therefore, the changes in the sport system during urbanisation, to a certain extent, have given women plenty of access and meanings to participation in sport, and to the realisation of individual ambition in sport.

Women's participation in sport has also been widely and deeply affected by the situation of women in the process of urbanisation. First, the economic situation has undoubtedly been a factor in whether they could participate in sport and to what extent they could engage in sport. Social stratification, initiated by urbanisation, has divided women's sport into different levels in relation to economic conditions. Second, the changes in educational methods and attitudes towards girls have affected their interests and sporting habits. The stress on physical education in schools has cultivated women's sports skills and knowledge. Different attitudes by parents towards girls' physical education have also had different impacts on girls' socialisation through sports and their sports participation. Third, the transformation of the family system has influenced women's participation in sport. The minimised family structure has released women from big families and given them more

opportunities to go out for their own pleasure. However, the ‘tribal burden’¹ on Chinese women is still likened to a heavy stone limiting their leisure time. This social problem has been particularly serious for middle-aged working-class women, who have to go out to work to feed their husbands and children and to take care of their parents. Fourth, the focus on women’s health and fitness has attracted women to participate in sport. During the process of urbanisation, Chinese women paid much more attention to their bodies and their health. However, a variety of concepts of the female body have generated different sport activities among Chinese women at the grassroots. They include lots of health protection sports, fitness exercises, entertainment activities and a few adventure activities. The different levels of sporting activities reflect the different requirements of Chinese women from different classes.

The urbanisation of China was a course in which the modern and the traditional confronted each other fiercely. Women’s participation in sport was a cultural phenomenon. It was shaped by the conflicts between traditional and modern culture. How to reconstruct the Chinese female body through sport provoked an extensive discussion and debate in Chinese society, permeating every aspect of women’s lives (Hong, 1997; Brownell, 1995; Dong, 2003). The female body had never been seen as a purely biological substance, but a cultural entity shaped by society.

Women’s participation in sport in the urbanisation of China was a complicated social phenomenon. It was the result of economic, political, social and cultural changes during the systematic transformation of Chinese society through urbanisation. By exploring how Chinese women participate in sport in the process of urbanisation within the economic, political, social and cultural context, we can draw a picture of Chinese women and their situation in society. Women are the most sensitive group reflecting the progress of the whole society. Women’s participation in sport is a direct way of mirroring the situation of women in the changing society. Thus, the exploration of women’s participation in sport is not just about sport and Chinese women; rather, it is intended to demonstrate the unprecedented transformation of Chinese society in the new era of the Chinese history.

¹ This includes work, housework and responsibility for taking care of parents.

1.6 Conclusion

Urbanisation was one of the most significant processes affecting human societies in the twentieth century. Since the 1980s, the Chinese market economy has been taking the place of a planned economy and leading China into a new era of urbanisation. The transition from rural to urban society has been conducive to the transformation of China in terms of technologies of production, the orientation of individuals, social institutions and cultural concepts, which in turn have created a new gender system in China.

Chinese women have been influenced by urbanisation both comprehensively and thoroughly. To Chinese women, urbanisation was an opportunity as well as a challenge, to change economically, politically and culturally. Market mechanisms have provided them with comparatively fair conditions to compete with men. Furthermore, urbanisation has brought Chinese women a new multi-cultural environment in which to choose their own lifestyle and form their new identity. In the process of urbanisation, Chinese women have met challenges, barriers and dilemmas that have brought them into an unexpected situation.

Sport, as a social product, for women, is 'a source of pleasure, an instrument of control or symbol of emancipation' (Mangan and Park: 3). Women's participation in sport is a necessary way for them to rebuild their body images, self-identity, social status and eventually liberate them from patriarchal society. Since 1949, Chinese women's sport has improved under very complex and unique social, cultural and political circumstances. An emphasis on the political function of women's sport on the international stage developed an imbalance between elite sport and mass sport, causing a contradiction: although female athletes had been fairly successful on the international stage, women's physical activity at the grassroots was still at a low level. In the new era of urbanisation in contemporary China, Chinese women's participation in sport acquired new characteristics in relation to the transformation of the sport system and Chinese women's involvement in urbanisation. Since the 1980s, Chinese sport has played a more complex role in society and for individuals – a combination of nationalism, commercialism and individualism. Changes in sports formation, sports

function and sports values have interacted with each other, providing social access for women to participate in sport individually and independently. In addition, the rise of women's participation in sport has been widely and deeply determined by women's new social situation in the process of urbanisation. Compared to the past, gaining economic independence, being released from the need for a big family and paying more attention to their bodies and health have provided them with possibilities and conditions to participate in sport. However, women's participation in sport as a kind of social and cultural phenomenon has developed tortuously under the conflicts between traditional and modern culture, which, in turn, have confused women and restricted them from being fully involved in sport.

In conclusion, women's participation in sport during urbanisation has been a fairly complicated but meaningful social phenomenon. Research on women's participation in sport directly reflects the situation of Chinese women in a changing society. In addition, it can testify to the unprecedented transformation of Chinese society in the new era of the Chinese history.

Chapter Two

Urbanisation Theories and Chinese Perspectives

2.1 Introduction

The exploration of women's participation in sport in urbanisation is a cross-disciplinary research. Therefore to help understand the changes and events in these fields it is necessary to draw upon literature from a number of different disciplines. These include urban studies, sport and socio-cultural studies, women's studies and body theories as well as using specialist knowledge from Chinese cases. These fields of knowledge are drawn on at various stages throughout the thesis to aid understanding of the principal contributions of Chinese urbanisation to women's participation in sport, gender relationships in the sport system and their impact on the traditional view of the female body and, finally, to review whether Chinese women are emancipating their bodies and achieving gender equality in the new era. In the following two chapters, I shall focus on sociological theories of urbanisation, sport, the body and feminism, and examine works in the fields of urban development, sport studies and women's studies by Chinese experts. These will be informed by existing theories in the West and studies developed in China. The argument aims to guide the research in a diverse range of fields but within an integrated framework. Chapter Two will examine urbanisation theories and Chinese urban studies first.

2.2 Sociological Theories of Urbanisation

Urbanisation was the most significant process affecting human societies around the world in the twentieth century. Until recent times, urbanisation was almost universally seen as a direct indication of modernisation, development and economic growth (Potter and Lloyd-Evans, 1998). Accompanying the process of urbanisation has been the development of academic endeavour aimed at

understanding the changes. In this section, I shall focus on the sociological theories of urbanisation generated in the West.

2.2.1 Defining Urbanisation

In order to understand urbanisation and its role in the research, it is necessary first to define the term so that we can delimit it from various perspectives and apply it appropriately. In this research, 'urbanisation' is the degree of or increase in urban character or nature. It may refer to a geographical area combining urban and rural areas or to the transformation of an individual locality from less to more urban. According to *The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology* (1995), urbanisation is defined as:

first, the statistical measure of the proportion of a country's population living in cities or settlements of a size defined variously by political, cultural or administrative criteria;

second, social processes and relationships which are both the cause and the consequence of urban rather than rural way of life (Johnson, 1995: 658).

Through this definition, sociologists distinguish very clearly two extremely distinct meanings of the term urbanisation (Eldridge, 1956; Popenoe, 1963).

One is the spatial concentration of population on the basis of defined limits of dimension and density (Bogue and Hauser, 1963; Davis, 1965); the other is the diffusion of the system of values, attitudes and behaviour called 'urban culture' (Friedmann, 1966; Anderson, 1959: 68). In other words, the term 'urbanisation' refers both to the constitution of specific spatial forms of human societies characterised by the significant concentration of activities and populations in a limited space and to the existence and diffusion of a particular cultural system (Susser, 2002). This definition is intended to establish a correspondence between ecological forms and a cultural content; and to suggest a concept of the production of social values on the basis of a 'natural' phenomenon of social heterogeneity.

Once one understands the key points of urbanisation, it is then necessary to consider how to examine urbanisation with relevance to the study within sociological perspectives. It has been mentioned that the sociological definition of urbanisation is a combination of spatial forms and cultural content. Whereas Susser (2002) has argued that the link between spatial form and cultural content might possibly serve as a hypothesis, it cannot constitute an element in the definition of urbanisation. Accordingly the purpose of this research is to examine the effects of urbanisation on the individual's way of life and values in specific historical, political and cultural contexts. This study analyses urbanisation through two main dimensions. From the macro dimension, it focuses on studying urbanisation as socio-structured transformation; from the micro dimension, it emphasises looking at urbanisation as change to an individual's way of life. The first aims to explain how the key forces – economic, political and cultural – interact with each other and impel the transformation of a social system with particularly Chinese characteristics. The second is intended to understand the effects of an urban social environment and urban way of life on people's behaviour, relationships and values in contemporary China. Based on the two analytical focuses, the research reviews how Western sociologists have explained the systematic process of urbanisation and how they have interpreted its effects on societies and individuals. These dimensional perspectives are essential to construct my analytical framework for viewing urbanisation in current Chinese society and its relationship to sport and women.

2.2.2 Classic Social Theories and Urbanisation

Urbanisation rapidly accelerated in the Western world during the nineteenth century and was a necessary consequence of the economic development of an industrial society. This had been taking place when the economic, social and environmental circumstances of urban areas had stimulated calls for reform as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution, causing a population movement from countryside to the new industrial cities (Fainstein and Campbell, 1996). Slattery (1985) pointed out that the most striking immediate change accompanying urbanisation was the rapid change in the prevailing character of local livelihoods as agriculture or more traditional local services and small-scale industry gave way to modern industry and urban-related

commerce. The city drew on the resources of an ever-widening area for its own sustenance and for goods to be traded or processed into commodities. Urbanisation attracted Western sociologists' attention at the time of the Western world's Industrial Revolution during the nineteenth century. Traditionally, from sociological and historical perspectives, urbanisation was the process by which the industrial city sprang from the economic and social revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Slattery, 1985). It was deeply influenced by the following factors:

- 1) the Agricultural Revolution with its new machinery, new techniques of crop rotation and stock breeding and the large-scale farming created by the enclosure movement, which pushed the peasants and small farmers off the land and created the surplus of food necessary to feed the new towns;
- 2) the Industrial Revolution with its factories, mines, and mills pulled such landless labour into the new towns with the promise of jobs, better wages and new freedoms;
- 3) the Transport Revolution that followed – the canals, roads, and ultimately the railways – provided the means for men and goods to move quickly round the country;
- 4) the Population Explosion of the nineteenth century provided the 'mass market' for the new goods and services being produced (Slattery, 1985).

The urbanisation which took place during the Industrial Revolution was usually described as free market or capitalist, guided more by the 'invisible' hand of the market than by the state (Slattery, 1985). To explain this social transformation, or what some historians have called a social revolution, the 'Founding Fathers of Sociology' made efforts to construct their own theoretical foundations of analysis: Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) through Structured Functionalism, Karl Marx (1818–1883) through Class Conflict, Max Weber (1864–1920) through the rise of Rational Thought.

Durkheim's functionalist model analysed society as a system of interrelated parts – economy, family, government etc. They were held together by a central value system, a general consensus and a set of norms and values by which members of society were socialised. Such a 'collective consciousness' provided the moral foundation by which

society controlled the aspirations and desires of individuals and so prevented interminable conflict over the distribution of wealth. Based on this assumption of society, Durkheim distinguished between the mechanical solidarity of small pre-industrial societies and the organic solidarity of modern mass industrial ones. According to Durkheim, in pre-industrial societies, relationships were face-to-face, highly personal and the division of labour was limited. Everyone knew everyone else, most doing a range of tasks rather than a specialised one. In such societies, the rights and privileges of each individual were well-known. The family and church acted as the main agents of social control. However, in large-scale industrial societies, life was not so clear cut. There was an extensive division of labour, relationships were far more impersonal; there was great variety of ethnic groups, sub-cultures and ways of life; there was a greater demand for individual rights and a variety of norms and codes of behaviour rather than a general consensus. Durkheim regarded urbanisation as the transformation of the social system. During this process, Durkheim believed that urbanisation would stimulate economic progress, individual creativity and a new moral order. However, he pointed out that in the transition from agrarian to industrial society, traditional controls would break down. Thus the individual would be left rootless, isolated and over-ambitious, so creating an enormous potential for social disorder. As the result of this lack of any well-defined set of norms, anarchy would prevail.

Marx and Engels (1820–1895) analysed societies based on historical materialism. They saw the rise of the industrial city as a sign of progress, as a key step towards economic abundance and socialism, as a step away from the backwardness and ‘idiocy of rural life’ and as a major step towards class consciousness, unity and social revolution (Slattery, 1985). They recognised that by creating such huge urban centres, capital brought the masses together and created a new working class. The working class in the cities would be aware of its oppression, would be increasingly organised and militant and increasingly move from being a ‘class in itself to a class for itself’ (Engels, 1969). For Marx and Engels the new industrial city reflected the essential features of the capitalist mode of production. The city acted as the centre for the new division of labour, new technology and structures of production; it represented the separation of society into two new classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The city became the arena for the intensification of such class conflict and for the growth

of 'monopoly capital' as the larger firms crushed the smaller in the perennial search for profit (Slattery, 1985).

Weber was the only one of the three to write specifically about the city. He was mainly concerned with the medieval city of the Middle Ages, which he saw as the cradle of many of the key features of modern society – the rise of bureaucracy, of modern government and democracy, of the new merchant class and early capitalist enterprises. Such cities helped the transition from feudalism to capitalism; they fostered the new spirit of rationality – of order and efficiency, of reason rather than tradition. They stimulated the new ideas, culture and administrative structures that were to prove so vital to the rise of Western capitalism. They encouraged individual enterprise and for a short time at least were independent, autonomous and the key centres of civilisation. However, with the rise of the great monarchs, of the nation-state and development of capitalism, such cities lost their independence and in Weber's view degenerated merely into expressions of society at large.

Durkheim's structured functionalism has been accepted as a general principle in analysing a social transformation which is regarded as a systematic change of the whole of society. On this basis, urbanisation as a change of spatial form was in fact the product of a structural and social process (Susser, 2002). However, Durkheim just described the process of urbanisation, but did not analyse how this process began or the essential force that accelerated these systematic changes. To answer these questions, Marx and Engels emphasised that economic progress, which was caused by the developed model of production-capitalism, was the main force in this social transformation and, moreover, the new working class emerging from this process would create a new society. In contrast to Karl Marx, Weber, through cultural insights, stressed that the changes of an individual's value – the emergence of the capitalist spirit – were the forces which pushed a society into an urbanised or civilised society.

As classic social theorists, Durkheim, Marx and Weber provided different analytical views and approaches to inform social science researchers in current academia. In order to examine Chinese urbanisation from economic, political and cultural standpoints, the research will connect these three points of view and integrate them into an analytical framework to explore the process of urbanisation in China. First,

informed by Marx, I shall analyse how economic reform has stimulated the process of urbanisation in China, how the global economy has accelerated this process and whether Chinese urbanisation is a form of capitalisation. Second, according to Weber, urbanisation is not only an economic process, but a process of new values permeating an individual's daily life. I aim to examine how the changes in people's lives, from a rural pattern to an urban pattern, have shaped their new value systems and how Chinese people internalise those urban cultural characteristics and in turn speed the process of urbanisation. Third, in addition to economic and cultural factors, I aim to analyse Chinese urbanisation by Durkheim's structural analysis of social phenomena. In so doing, this study needs to create an analytical framework for the systematic transformation of social institutions and their relationships.

The founding fathers of sociology were in many ways closer to revolution than their modern followers, because they lived through the revolutions of the nineteenth century. They sought to explain such massive social changes in the Western world by exploring the social factors that caused the process of urbanisation as a part of social transformation. In other words, they did not really pay much attention to urbanisation or urban issues, but aimed to interpret modern society as mirrored by the city in the transformation era. Whereas their basic perspectives, approaches and ideas about the transformation of the social system were crucial for building the analytical framework of urbanisation and contributing to urban sociology, what they tended to concentrate on were particular features of the effects of urban change.

2.2.3 Classic Urban Theories

By comparison with the classic social theories of urbanisation, the development of urban studies over the past 100 years has broadened and deepened and been enriched through the development of alternative theoretical perspectives and empirical analyses (Paddison, 2001). Taking the period from 1890 to 1980, Dunleavy (1982) has suggested that there have been five main traditions of urban studies: locational analysis, studies of systems of cities, socio-cultural perspectives, institutional analyses and political economy approaches. Although there were also a variety of further different approaches to these insights, the perspectives crystallised around the key

question of the rise of the city and its effects on societies and individuals. In particular, the effects of urbanisation on the changes in people's lifestyles and social psychology in an urban environment have been taken into account as the subject of research and debate in urban theories. The following are three major views from Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936), Georg Simmel (1858-1918) and Louis Wirth (1897-1952).

From the macro dimension, the distinctive consequence of urbanisation on society and the individual results from what Ferdinand Tönnies has called the *Gesellschaft* relationships of industrial society taking the place of the *Gemeinschaft* of traditional society. By *Gemeinschaft*, Tönnies is referring to the sense of community, the intimacy of face-to-face relationships, the sense of place (social and geographical) and the sense of belonging that came from being brought up in a particular locality amongst family and friends, according to time-honoured traditions and under the control of the family and church. The *Gesellschaft* relationship of society was portrayed as much more superficial, impersonal and calculating. It is derived from the competitive and highly mobile nature of industrial society where relationships were not an end in themselves but a means to profit and self-interest. Business ethics provided the dynamism and values of society and morality of the individual (Slattery, 1985). Although Tönnies was pessimistic about the effects of industrialisation and urbanisation on society, his comparative research on identified relationships and the differences in way of life between rural (village) and urban (city) have created a new analytical model of urban studies.

If Tönnies described the characteristics of urban life from the macro dimension, Georg Simmel, one of the pioneering German sociologists, described it through the micro dimension, paying more attention to urban life. He applied Tönnies's ideas specifically to the urban environment and argued that the city created a unique type of personality, a particular sort of mentality geared to the rush, complexity and calculation of urban life (Simmel, 1950). In the market economy of the city, money, self-interest and rational calculation formed the basis of relationships. There was no time for sentiment, because the pace of life was too fast. People treated others as objects rather than individuals. Simmel analysed the psychological effects of an urban lifestyle. He suggested that the increased concentration and diversity of people and

ongoing activities in the city put urbanites under stress (a cognitive overload). This was considered the major cause of the urban mentality – detachment from others, self-centredness, and a rational calculating mind. However, Simmel also saw the urban environment as potentially liberating, allowing the individual to escape traditional controls and the pettiness of small town life, to express his own individuality and creativity (Slattery, 1985).

On the basis of European theorists like Tönnies and Simmel, the Chicago school tried to explain the underlying law of urban life. They developed the theory of human ecology, a theory that combined Darwin's notion of a struggle for survival and Durkheim's of a moral consensus. Building on Darwin, the Chicago school drew the city as a social organism with a life of its own, continually adapting to its environment. Informed by Durkheim, they discovered inbuilt tension between the individual's need for freedom and society's need for social control. Thus they argued that cities change people through a complex interaction of physical and moral forces.

Among the members of the Chicago school in this period was Louis Wirth, who analysed city life as being more cultural than ecological. Louis Wirth was the theorist who first proposed the idea of urbanisation as a 'way of life'. In Wirth's view, the ecological and demographic structure of city life, particularly the large structures, high population density and heterogeneous population mix resulting from urbanisation, produced numerous social and socio-psychological consequences. Wirth held that these consequences, taken together, constituted a new pattern of culture, a 'way of life', that he termed *urbanism* (Wirth, 1983). He stressed urbanism as a form of social existence, characterised by fleeting, impersonal interactions; the rapid pace of life; and the development of a homogeneous and anonymous mass. It was these characteristics that distinguished city life from that in the country. According to Wirth, the size, density and heterogeneity of the city created social segregation, impersonality and both social and geographical mobility. The individual no longer had a set place; his relationships with others were highly rational, superficial and transitory. People in cities tended to be nervous, irritable, isolated, alienated and powerless. However, Wirth was not totally pessimistic. He saw the possibility of cities settling down and establishing some sense of permanence and character. Moreover, he regarded urbanism not only as the way of life of the city but of modern society.

Modern societies frequently involved impersonal, anonymous social relationships, but they were also the sources of diversity.

These theories outlined the main trends in urban growth and its consequences on society and individuals. However, as Slattery (1985: x) has argued, 'cities were not only the laboratories of the social scientist'. Governments, too, experiment politically with cities. The city has been the focus of considerable analytical diagnosis and policy-making by politicians. Thus modern urban sociology has fragmented into a wider variety of ideas and perspectives, some directly concerned with the development of the city, others more with changes in society at large. The emphasis has moved from theory to practice, from general theses to empirical analyses. It has become a multi-disciplinary approach that seeks to combine the perspectives of the whole range of social science, from geography to economics, political science to anthropology, as a means of obtaining an overall picture of how the city today works and is changing (Paddison, 2001).

From this background, sport studies and gender studies have paid more and more attention to relating themselves to urban studies. For instance, sport sociologists have tried to explain how the rise of the city has made sport rationalised, specialised, organised, commercialised and professionalised and how city culture recreates sports behaviour and sports values, which in turn influences people's lives (Coakley, 2001; Riess, 1989). Meanwhile, feminists have aimed to explore whether the modern city offers an opportunity for women to change their gender role or rather renders them continually disempowered, underlining the entrenched nature of the perceived inequalities of gender (Booth et al., 1996; McDowell, 1997). As for the study of urbanisation and Chinese women's participation in sport, it aims to fill the gap of urban studies, sport studies and women's studies in the context of the Chinese perspective.

2.3 Chinese Perspectives on Urbanisation

As in the West, urbanisation, for China, has been a prerequisite for its development economically, politically and culturally. Understanding Chinese urbanisation is the

key to analysing the changes to the sport system and the gender system in transitional China. Since it is a new phenomenon which has arisen in the last twenty-five years, urbanisation studies in China have not formed a theoretical system. Nonetheless, as an urgent task with realistic meanings, urbanisation has been an important topic in both academic studies and practical implementation in contemporary China. Many Chinese or foreign scholars have devoted themselves to examining Chinese urbanisation, a very unusual case, by different approaches. Based on the purposes and objectives of the research, I shall review current studies of Chinese urbanisation specifically from the perspectives of the economy, politics, culture and gender.

2.3.1 An Overview of Chinese Urbanisation

In Section 2.2, I reviewed urban theories developed in the West, which provided a general theoretical framework to analyse urbanisation and urban issues worldwide. However, as a specific case, Chinese urbanisation has been a more complicated process with a unique historical, political and cultural background. Unlike urbanisation in Western countries, before the 1980s China's urbanisation was centrally planned rather than the result of the market. Political need was the guiding light rather than the pursuit of profit. Contrasted with the Soviet model, the process of Chinese urbanisation was not parallel with industrialisation. The rate of urbanisation was far lower than that of industrialisation. Unlike most developing countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa, urbanisation in China was not a direct consequence of its dependent economic status in the imperialist world. Since the 1980s, when Chinese urbanisation began, some Chinese scholars have tried to use Western urban theories and practices to shape the pattern of Chinese urbanisation (Wu, 1980; Xu et al., 1995). However, others have suggested that urbanisation studies in China should develop with its own specific requirements, approaches, insights and focuses (Fei, 1998; Liu, 2002; Zhu, 2003).

As soon as Chinese scholars identified urbanisation as an institutional transformation of Chinese society, they turned to stress the importance of using institutional concepts to understand the performance of urbanisation in Chinese society (He, 2003b; Zhang, 2002a). What was meant by institutional? *The American Heritage Dictionary of the*

English Language identifies institutions with established organisations; others have defined institutions as informal rules such as customs (2000). Masahiko Aoki's definition (2001) conceptualises institutions as 'shared beliefs' among people about the ways a game is actually played. In his opinion, a new institutional arrangement will emerge only when the expectations of people have converged about the new ways of playing the game (Aoki, 1998). From this point of view, Chinese urbanisation as an institutional transformation can be understood in two dimensions. One is the process of how the principles in different institutions coincide with each other and act in one direction. Another is a course of how Chinese people learn to 'play the game' under the new principles in the context of economic, political, social and cultural changes.

2.3.2 Economic Perspective on Chinese Urbanisation

Economic growth has been the most crucial and urgent task for China, in order to utilise a vast workforce efficiently and to use its natural resources economically. As a result, no matter whether in relation to state plans or in terms of academic researches, urbanisation studies will always centre on this topic and serve it. The economic perspective identifies urbanisation as involved in collectively restructuring all economic factors (including population, labour, capital and resources), mainly in response to the needs of advanced industrialisation. From this viewpoint, economists indicate that

instead of interpreting urbanisation as a process parallel to economic modernisation, it is more appropriate to interpret urbanisation as the essence of economic modernisation – or at least, a spatial manifestation of economic modernisation (Cheng, 1990: 65).

From a comprehensive review of the economic studies of Chinese urbanisation, two main themes emerge in the analysis of the relationships between economic growth and the process of urbanisation. The first aims to explain how economic reform has engendered the process of urbanisation in China (the economic forces of urbanisation). The second aims to explore an appropriate urbanisation pattern, which can continue to stimulate the growth of Chinese economy (the economic effects of urbanisation).

As for the forces of urbanisation, Chinese scholars have reached a common understanding. They believe that Chinese urbanisation since the 1980s, like the former experiences of Western countries, has been associated with a process of industrialisation and the emergence of a market economy (Kwok et al., 1990). Other researchers argue that Chinese urbanisation has not been a completely natural process; it was strictly controlled by the state (Zhang, 2002b; Kirkby, 1988). K.H. Zhang (2002a) in his article 'What explains China's rising urbanisation in the reform era?' investigated the specific factors which contributed to rising urbanisation in the period from 1978 to 2000. He stressed that the main driving forces behind urbanisation were the changes in urban policy and market economic growth. It was the changes of policy that encouraged economic liberalisation and the inflows of foreign investment. Changes in economic forms stimulated the rise in urban areas and urban population, transforming the social structure. The distinctive changes in the social structure were the emergence of top managers, private business owners and expatriates in joint ventures or transnational corporations (TNCs). According to Gu and Shen (2003), these new groups created a new elite class in cities and conceptualised a new form of urban life, accelerating the pace of urbanisation and, meanwhile, attracting some new issues. Therefore, a new policy was needed to solve those issues arising from the process of urbanisation.

Since Chinese urbanisation has been treated as a means of economic development and modernisation, the debate on the patterns of Chinese urbanisation has become centralised both in the state policy and in the Chinese academy. The discussion could be divided into three stages:

1. The first stage was from 1979 to 1983, when the universality and inexorability of the urbanisation process was proclaimed. This emphasis can be detected in Chinese writings on urbanisation after 1982. The following are typical examples:

Urbanisation is a necessary consequence of the economic development of society, whatever the country, whatever its social system, admitting absolutely no exception (Li, 1983: 27).

Urbanisation is an objective law in the development of the commodity economy and is a trend which cannot be obstructed (Ma, 1983: 126).

The first stage constructed the theoretical basis for launching urbanisation in China.

2. The second stage was from 1984 to 1993, when debates on the patterns of urbanisation emerged and deepened. During this period, the small-town development model, the big-city strategy, the rational development of medium-sized cities and the model of small municipalities all emerged. In these debates Chinese scholars did not address the number of urbanisation patterns; rather, they implied that Chinese experts had constructed urbanisation studies with Chinese characteristics. In the course of finding a pattern to suit China, Chinese scholars and urbanites confronted a series of dilemmas that encouraged them to reconsider urbanisation within more comprehensive perspectives (Yang, 2003; He, 2003b).

3. The third stage was from the early 1990s to the present. Chinese scholars realised that although leadership and rationally organised design is very important to the growth of urban China, they sometimes generated unintended and unexpected social outcomes. Gar-on Yeh and Wu, F. (1999) in their research 'The transformation of the urban planning system in China from a centrally planned to transitional economy' have demonstrated that the state and centrally planned economy has had a less significant role to play in influencing the development of cities. Past urban planning practices, which were legitimised by the socialist ideology of planned growth, were now fundamentally challenged. Economic reforms had triggered a reorganisation of the economy and society on which urban planning operated. Decentralisation of decision-making, market-led urban development initiatives, a retreat from socialist ideology, deregulation and an increase in the number of actors and conflicts of interests in land development have challenged fundamentally the practice of urban planning. The deficiencies of the conventional urban planning system have been recognised. The enactment of the 1989 City Planning Act was a major milestone that tried to re-establish and formalise the urban planning system in China. It aimed to provide a better guidance for urban planning and development control to move from a centrally planned economy to a transitional economy (Chinese Mayors Association, 2003).

In summary, an understanding of Chinese urbanisation could not avoid the economic dimension. Economic development has been a requirement of Chinese society and the Chinese people. It was the original force and the initial aim of the Chinese

urbanisation plan, whereas, just as Western classic urban theorists indicate, urbanisation is not only an economic change, but rather a systematic transformation of the whole of society. Accompanying economic growth, urbanisation has changed social environments, structures and functions, which directly or indirectly affect people's way of life. Awareness of environmental pollution, unemployment, social inequality, political corruption and criminal and moral collapse have stimulated diverse trends in urbanisation studies in contemporary China. These trends, in accordance with Wirth's theories, are actually centred on how Chinese people's ways of life change in the context of the transformation. Urbanisation in China is now at a crossroads. The economic approach on its own is not sufficient to explain and solve all the problems emerging in this process. Therefore urbanisation needs to undergo political, cultural and philosophical reforms in order for it to achieve its role in guiding Chinese development into the 21st century.

2.3.3 Socio-Political Perspectives on Chinese Urbanisation

If the economic perspective stresses that urbanisation is the fruit of economic reform, launching economic modernisation in China, socio-political perspectives pay attention to the social consequences of the transformation from the centrally planned system to the market system. Over the last two decades, China's urbanisation has stimulated socio-political debate on how the transformation involves a fundamental redefinition of the social contract between government and the individual (Tang and Parish, 2000). The changes in the roles of state and market and their relationship to individuals constitute the new crucial concerns of urbanisation studies in China (Liu, 1999; Shi, 1997 and Solinger, 1999).

The political perspective on Chinese urbanisation is guided by two major issues. The first issue concerns the impact of the changes in the state-controlled system and its functions on individuals in the context of the transformation from a centrally planned system to a market-oriented system. The second one is the debate, in market contract terms, on which groups are to get the greater reward from urbanisation.

In relation to the first issue, Tang and L. Parish (2000), in their book *Chinese Urban Life under Reform: the Changing Social Contract*, argue that before the reforms, the

state-controlled system was based on vertical dependency. Under this system goods were distributed not through open market principles, but through redistributionist channels. Suppliers were indebted to bureaucratic superiors and a lack of alternative employment possibilities outside their work units. They were organised in a single, pyramid-shaped hierarchy, and their own fate was controlled by state-owned work units. Once Chinese society was commercialised and urbanised, education, stratification, family systems and even personalities began to converge, demanding changes in the socialist authoritarian system. This change attracted discussion on how to rebuild relationships between society, government and members of society; which roles work units and social organisations should play in the individual's life; and what people's demands were for democracy and freedom of speech (Shi, 1997 and Solinger, 1999). In a sentence, capturing the new relationships between state, society and the individual was not only a stern challenge to the Chinese political system but also the key to an understanding the Chinese people's everyday life under urbanisation.

The second severe issue facing the Chinese current socio-political system was how to deal with social injustice and inequalities under urbanisation. In fact, this issue essentially raised the question: who actually reaped the greater reward from the transformation from a socialist system to a market system? (Bian, 1994) It covers many specific problems such as social segregation and social polarisation, discrimination against migrants, gender inequality, insufficiency of urban services and social welfare. As Chinese urbanisation has deepened, social polarisation and segregation have become acute problems in the Chinese cities. The emergence of a new elite class, the formation of a poor migrant class (Chan, 1996; Shen, 2000; He, 2003a) and the income gap between different social classes (Gu and Shen, 2003) in the city has created new problems of inequality and injustice. In addition to class inequality, some scholars have noticed that gender inequality and discrimination in relation to urbanisation are still problematic. They argue forcefully that the return of women to the home has actually been a strategy for clearing the way for men's employment (Li, 1994) – in other words, removing them to partly control surplus labour problems. Whether it is a class or a gender issue, the result seems to be social inequality and injustice, where the rich become even richer and the poor become even poorer.

This new phenomenon has happened after social conflicts generated by economic reform. It is believed that social services and social welfare, to a certain extent, can be used to reduce these conflicts. However, in China at present, a lack of clarity as to the responsibilities of the work unit (the state) on the one hand and the social organisation (society) on the other had have made the conflicts more serious than ever before. Recent debates on topics such as rural-urban migration (Shen, 1995), the Chinese household system (Bruun, 1993), the rural-urban divide (Guang, 2001), the urban housing system (Gu, 1995) and women's unemployment (Li, 1994) are all reflections of the conflicts that result from dilemmas in this systematic social transformation.

In conclusion, socio-political perspectives on urbanisation reflect popular attitudes to the question of whether a sharp shift has occurred away from the egalitarian, secure, redistributive values of the ailing social system towards the non-egalitarian, high-risk, producer values of a vigorous market-based social system (Tang and Parish, 1996). Understanding how the change in the socio-political system has impacted on society and individuals provides the background to understanding the complicated cultural behaviour and values arising from urbanisation.

2.3.4 Socio-Cultural Perspectives on Chinese Urbanisation

In the previous sections, it has been demonstrated that Chinese urbanisation studies provide socio-political perspectives on urbanisation in China since the 1980s, and concentrate on examining the transformation from a planned system to a market system. In this section, I shall examine socio-cultural perspectives on urbanisation, which regards urbanisation as a transformation from traditional (rural) culture to modern (urban) culture.

Chinese history has deep-rooted cultural values. The monumental man-made structures, awesome natural features, and spectacular beauty of the Chinese landscape, together with the colourful accounts of China's legendary figures that circulated in both popular media and elite writings contributed substantially to the formation of a distinctively 'Chinese' identity. Therefore in order to understand Chinese urbanisation in the specific historic period since the 1980s, many scholars suggest that we should relate urbanisation studies to the background of Chinese culture (Fei, 1998).

From the sixteenth century to the present, China faced a series of dilemmas that intensified under Western encroachment in the nineteenth century and continued throughout the revolutionary upheavals of the twentieth century (Li and Li, 1987). During this process, the entire ethical and cultural system was called into question by Chinese critics with a multitude of agendas. Under the hostile circumstances of the twentieth century, Chinese thinkers viewed the dynamics of events in China as propelled by the need to accommodate 'tradition' to the demands of 'modernity' (Li and Li, 1987). In other words, the central question was how could Chinese traditional culture compete with modern Western culture? In response to the conservative view that traditional Chinese culture was superior to that of the West, other intellectuals treated Chinese traditional culture as the source of China's problems (Chen, 1917). They argued that the core of the culture – Confucianism – was the foundation of Chinese feudal society and the root cause of China's lagging economically behind other countries (Lin, 1979).

In contrast to the social reformers or revolutionists, it was Fei Xiaotong, one of the most prestigious sociologists in China, who in his book *From the Soil*¹ (1947) first ascribed Chinese cultural characteristics to the rural form of Chinese society. Unlike the conservative parties or radical critics, through sociological approach and an objective attitude, he cautiously demonstrated that China was actually a traditional agricultural society. Agriculture differed from both pastoralism and industry. Farmers were necessarily connected to the land, whereas herdsmen drifted about, following the water and the grass, and were forever unsettled. Industrial workers might choose where they live, and they might move without difficulty; but farmers could not move their land or the crops they grew. Always waiting for their crops to mature, those old farmers seem to have planted half their own bodies into the soil. Agricultural characteristics shaped Chinese organisational character, culture and national personality. For Fei Xiaoting, the central feature of Chinese society was its 'differential mode of association' (*chaxu geju*). It was based on society, relationships and tracked categories of social connections. He argued that it was the feature of 'different mode of association' that reflected, and were reflected in, the moral and ethical characteristics of people in Chinese society. He also compared the different

¹ *From the Soil* was first published in Chinese in 1947 and was Fei's chief theoretical statement about the distinctive characteristics of Chinese society. It was republished in English in 1992.

principles of organisation of China and Western countries, using two metaphors: Western organisation was formed by straws collected to form a haystack, whereas Chinese society consisted of the waves generated by the splash of a rock thrown into water (Fei, 1992; Fei, 1998). The former principle was a way of urban organisation, whereas the latter was very discursive, permeating every aspect of rural society. As a result, according to Fei (1998), although cities had existed in ancient and modern China, Chinese people with their strong rural characteristics were actually organised by rural rules within an urban way of life. Rural culture dominated Chinese people's lifestyles, ethics and values. That was why Chinese traditional culture was dramatically attacked by culture movements from the 1840s to the Maoist era, however, it was always the hidden rule that controlled Chinese people's behaviour, attitudes and concepts. Unlike an economic or political system, which could be changed dramatically by revolutions or reforms, a cultural system was relatively stable and not very easily eradicated.

In addition to the macro-views of urbanisation as a competition between traditional (rural) and modern (urban) culture influenced by Western urban studies, Chinese urban cultural studies began to notice the changes in urban cultural activities in people's everyday lives. During the new era of urbanisation since the 1980s, influenced by commercialisation, market reform and globalisation, we could see new cultural phenomena emerging in Chinese society and in people's lives, which to a certain extent shook the foundations of Chinese rural culture. Chinese scholars began to focus on doing empirical research about specific cultural activities rather than theoretically analysing the competition between Chinese traditional culture and western modern culture (Zhang, 2003). Observations of people's urban activities within a cultural framework offered a new perspective from which to examine urbanisation and its effect on Chinese people and society. The biggest contribution of urbanisation to people's way of life and values was in the revival of the pursuit of the good life (Wang and Dong, 2003). It was distinctively reflected by a rapid commercialisation of consumer activities during the urbanisation process. Wang Yalin and Dong Hongyang (2003) regard the rise of commercial consumption as the engine of the new urban life in China, implying that individualism, rather than collectivism, was becoming central to the Chinese moral and ethical system. In addition, Davis (2000) indicated that the rise of consumption did more than simply increase urban

consumer choice and raise the material standards of living. Rather, it shaped a real urban way of life that gradually but deeply changed the Chinese cultural system. Some scholars have devoted themselves to specific research on the implications of new consumer behaviour in different urban spheres. These studies include domestic spending and everyday purchases of food (Yan, 2000), clothing (Roberts, 1997), transportation (Zacharias, 2003), housing (Guan et al., 2001), healthcare (Yi and Vaupel, 2002) and more unusual occasions such as weddings (Gillette, 2000). Outside the domestic sphere, they have explored the experiences of urban public activities such as the exchange of greeting cards (Erbaugh, 2000), radio call-in shows (Erwin, 2000), dancing (Kraus, 2000; Farrer, 2000) and bowling (Wang, 2000). Those specific studies document an increasing reliance by urban residents on horizontal ties of friendship, kinship or informal sociability that challenges the vertical relationships of rural society (Davis, 2000). In addition, these explorations reflect the compatibility of different urban lifestyles and diverse values.

This socio-cultural perspective has been applied to the study of urbanisation in analysing women's participation in sport in contemporary China. It was not only because cultural changes, such as the rise of cultural consumption and cultural activities in people's lives, are very remarkable in the process of urbanisation, but also that the culture is deeply tied to key concepts in the study of sport and women. Sport is a social setting where culture is produced and reproduced (Coakley, 2001), and has become a pervasive part of our everyday lives. As for Chinese women, the behaviour expected of them, the sense of self associated with them and the meanings assigned to them, are all cultural constructions mapped by specific Chinese traits and state authority. As a result, a socio-cultural perspective could assist in understanding how urban culture has influenced women and their participation in sport and how this has reshaped popular culture in an urbanised Chinese society. Chapter Three will specifically address this point through theoretical reviews of sport and women.

2.3.5 Feminist Perspectives on Chinese Urbanisation

The urbanisation process in China has been a significant economic, political and cultural force. Chinese women have been influenced by this social transformation

comprehensively. In order to understand Chinese women as a category in the context of the new era since the 1980s, women's studies conducted in China had been animated by a variety of concerns (Li, 2001a). First of all, they involve the multiple effects of social reform on women. Researchers have looked at women's income, job opportunities and rates of participation in the workforce, their access to education and the intensification of the gendered division of labour; for example, Wu Zhaohua's (2001) study 'Period of transformation of China's economy: Challenges facing women and the counter measures' and Jiang Yongpin's (2001) research on women's employment in cities. Some scholars have begun to analyse the particular situation of rural women: their movement into non-agricultural pursuits, as well as their changing contribution to the household economy, for example, in the book *On the Move: Women and Rural-to-Urban Migration in Contemporary China*, edited by Gaetano and Jacka (2004). Second, with respect to women's reproductive labour, some scholars have looked at a range of issues: reproductive health (Zhao, 2001), birth control (Xie, 2001), abortion (Evans, 1997), maternity leave, childcare facilities and the division of labour in the home (Entwisle and Henderson, 2000). Third, experts in the legal field have turned their attention to the legal basis for women's rights passed in 1992 and the new marriage law in 2001 (Wang, 2001a). Fourth, some scholars have also tried to restore women to Chinese history to explore gendered writing strategies in literature in the urban era (Mann and Cheng, 2001). Fifth, the boundary between women's studies scholarship and activism is a permeable one; scholars have been active in establishing practices and issuing position papers on a variety of legal and social issues (Gilmartin, 1994). 'Strengthen women's theoretical studies, promote women's development' was established as the current task of Chinese women and the state (Peng, 2001).

In order to explore the economic effects of urbanisation on women's status, Chinese scholars have conducted empirical research and theoretical analyses. They noticed that in urban areas, life tenure for workers, or the 'iron rice bowl' policy, has ended in many industries, meaning those workers could lose their jobs (Jin, 2001). Researchers suggest that in the market system, once freed from top-down administrative control, employers hire fewer married women with young children (Entwisle and Henderson, 2000).

Li Xiaojiang (1994), an influential scholar on women's studies in China, has turned a critical eye towards the social and political contradictions that women are facing as a result of economic reform. Women, she contends, have been a focus in the development of Chinese modernity under reform and urbanisation. However, they have been used to resolve problems of surplus labour, production efficiency, the use of educated personnel and so on. She argues that this situation has been treated not as a significant social issue; the road China has been pursuing towards modernity makes economic sense and leads in exactly the opposite direction from the road women ought to be travelling (Gilmartin, 1994: 24). If reform holds the promise of promoting China's economic development, it has never mentioned women's needs for their own development. Arguing that women's liberation is not the same thing as class liberation or equality with men, Li calls for women to arouse their collective consciousness in order to pursue their freedom as human beings, to possess a sense of self-worth, and to affirm the positive qualities of what has been denigrated as 'femininity' (Li, 1994; Bao, 1998).

In contrast to the pessimistic predictions about the situation of Chinese women under the reform era, some scholars hold the opinion that although the state cannot keep its (top-down) promise for women's own development, the new (bottom-up) social factors stemming from urbanisation might bring new opportunities and possibilities for women themselves to be released from their traditionally assigned roles. Yang (1999) has pointed out that during the Maoist era, while making advances in women's education, basic rights and employment, the government was concerned mainly with giving women access to the realm of public labour, while women's production in the cultural realms was denied by the dominance of state discourse and by a state 'erasure of gender'. In the current period of China's urbanisation and its entry into global capitalism, the heightened awareness of gender differences and discrimination has contributed to a re-examination of women's subjectivity within cultural discourse (Brownell and Wasserstrom, 2002). Internally, the Chinese market economy today has enabled new spaces for public discourse to emerge in urban areas, such as the increased numbers and varieties of newspapers, popular magazines, new academic and literary journals and dramatic developments in electronic media such as radio and television programmes, videotape, DVDs and websites. Through this expanded array of media new and different voices can be heard; meanwhile new visual images of

gender and sexuality displace the old masculine view of the revolutionary culture (Yang, 1999). Externally, the cultural flux of Western ideology has affected Chinese traditional culture and socialist culture. Influenced by Western individualism and the feminist movement around the world, Chinese women have begun to recognise the power of their own voice. Chinese intellectual women have come to realise that male power has dominated state discourse and cultural discourse, and furthermore controls women's future (Li, 2003). They have begun to use mass media such as films, magazines, TV and radio programmes and the Internet resources to produce discourse from their own experience. Chinese women's studies, therefore, turn their attention more to exploring the meanings behind women's images in the realm of cultural production (Liu, 2001a).

In conclusion, since the 1980s, Chinese feminist research on women and their relationship with urbanisation has taken two approaches. The first concerns the development of women's status, with particular attention to education, labour and the impact on technology (Jin and Liu, 1998). The main argument is that although urbanisation has brought China a great improvement in many aspects of society, women have been left behind in the social development process (Li, 1994). The second approach attempts a unified analysis of women's oppression. It uses feminist concepts of patriarchy or focuses on a symbolic, cross-cultural division between domestic and public spheres to explore male domination in the family, the workplace and politics (Rofel, 1999; Shi, 2004; Li, 2001b). All these research aim to make women visible. They try to alter disciplinary knowledge and provide new ways of analysing women's position in multi-layered contexts.

Sport for women has been a new way of struggling against the existing patriarchal viewpoint in order to re-conceptualise the cultural meanings of the female body. In the process of urbanisation, sport has developed new ways of consumption, leisure, entertainment and socialisation in urban China. The relationship between women and sport provides a new point of access and a specific perspective to reveal women's opportunities and challenges in terms of economic status, political discourses and cultural images. In addition, understanding how Chinese women participate in sport in the new era can expand the concept of gender to include the symbolic meanings of femininity and masculinity that shape the way in which power is represented in a

society. However, in the same way that sport studies are on the fringe of Chinese social science, so far, women's studies in China have not systematically explored the relationship between sport, women and the body in the context of urbanisation. In the West, sport as a social, cultural and political activity has become a very useful tool for feminists to explore how gender ideology is formed, reproduced and transformed in and through the everyday experience of men and women. Therefore, the exploration of the relationship between sport and women in the context of urbanisation might bring a new viewpoint contributing to women's studies in China.

2.4 Conclusion

Over the past two decades, China has been involved in a great historic process of urbanisation, which constitutes the social background of this research within its economic, political and cultural aspects.

In order to give the research a theoretical foundation, this chapter first reviewed sociological theories of urbanisation developed in the West. The urbanisation which took place during the Industrial Revolution was usually described as a free market or capitalist one, and was guided more by the 'invisible' hand of the market than by the state (Slattery, 1985). To explain this social transformation, Emile Durkheim, through structured functionalism, Karl Marx, through class conflict, and Max Weber, through the rise of rational thought, built their basic assumptions, approaches and ideologies about the transformation of the social system. By comparison with the classic social theories, the studies of urbanisation as it has developed over the previous 100 years have been enriched by the development of alternative theoretical perspectives and empirical analyses. From a macro-dimension, Tönnies distinguished the *Gesellschaft* relationships of industrial society and the *Gemeinschaft* ones of traditional society. From a micro-dimension, Simmel analysed the psychological effects of the urban lifestyle. The Chicago school tried to explain the underlying law of urban life and drew the picture of the city as a social organism with a life of its own, continually adapting to its environment. Louis Wirth first proposed the idea of urbanisation as a 'way of life', which he defined as urbanism. In summary, modern urban sociology has fragmented into a wider variety of themes and perspectives, some directly concerned

with the city, others more with changes in society at large. It has moved from the theoretical to the practical, from general theses to empirical analyses and has become a multi-disciplinary approach that seeks to combine the perspectives of the whole range of social sciences.

The sociological theories of urbanisation provide comprehensive methods and perspectives for analysing urbanisation as a general world phenomenon. For China, urbanisation studies are an urgent task with realistic meanings. More than 20 years have passed during which urbanisation studies in Chinese academia have progressed in parallel with social reform and open-door policy. Linked closely to the development of the social sciences, the study of urbanisation had become a multi-faceted body of knowledge embracing a wide range of disciplines. However, it has not formed a theoretical system and most researches have been at a utilitarian level. In spite of that, many Chinese and foreign scholars have devoted themselves to examining Chinese urbanisation, a very unusual case within different approaches.

First, through economic perspectives, research has attempted to explain how economic reform engenders the process of urbanisation in China and which patterns of urbanisation can continue to stimulate the growth of the Chinese economy. Second, with a political perspective, research has dealt with the changes in the state-controlled system and its effects on individuals in the context of the transformation from a centrally planned system to a market system. Third, the profound transformation from a rural lifestyle to an urban way of life has led to a proliferation of new research to capture and characterise this transformation from specific cultural viewpoints. Cultural studies conceptualise urbanisation as a social process permeated with conflicts between traditional (rural) and modern (urban) culture and as a cultural way of changing urban activities in people's lives. The economic, political and cultural approaches are the mainstreams of urbanisation studies in China.

With the claim that adding women to the social and historical picture (Gilmartin, 1994), research has striven to comprehend Chinese social relations, institutions and cultural productions by highlighting gender as a category of urbanisation studies. Since then, the feminist perspective has given prominence to gender relations under urbanisation. Feminists have first discussed the development of women's status in the context of urbanisation, with particular attention to education, labour and the impact

on technology. Moreover, feminists have used social transformation as an approach to the struggle against patriarchy with a focus on the symbolic, cross-cultural division between domestic and public spheres, male domination in the family and the workplace and politics. Through this work feminists have attempted to make women visible and audible. It has also provided new ways of thinking about women in relation to urbanisation.

In conclusion, urbanisation is the key word. How to define, examine and analyse this process will determine where this research is going. Informed by Western sociological theories and Chinese perspectives, urbanisation in this research is defined as a social process which has transformed Chinese society by fundamentally altering not only the character and structure of the society but also the very environment Chinese people live in; not only where they live but also how they live; not only their relationships with other people but also their whole 'way of life' (Slattery, 1985). Based on this definition, the analytical framework of urbanisation in this study is led by two main perspectives. From the macro dimension, the research will focus on studying urbanisation as a socially structured transformation; from the micro dimension, it will stress looking at urbanisation as a change in the individual's lifestyle.

Sport as a social phenomenon and cultural practice is recreated by human beings in society. How urbanisation has shaped Chinese sport in the context of economic, political, cultural and global changes and how sport has become a new arena for women to express themselves and to achieve real gender equality in the sports world are the core questions which need to be explored in this study. In order to inform the study in the following chapter, I shall continue to review Western sport theories and feminist perspectives on sporting bodies.

Chapter Three

Social Theories of Sport and Sport Feminism

3.1 Introduction

Chapter Two outlined the theories of urbanisation which frame the approach to the historical and social context of this research. This chapter will concentrate on social theories of sport and body theories from a feminist perspective. As suggested in Chapter One, sport is a very useful tool for understanding Chinese women's status in the process of urbanisation. Sport, which is related to the social and cultural contexts in which we live, provides the stories and images that many of us use to explain and evaluate the events in our lives and our connections to the world around us (Coakley, 2001). For women, sport can be the tool for challenging and transforming oppressive forms of gender relations (Hargreaves, 1994). It has been controversially used by feminists to explain gender differences and gender relations by uncovering the social construction of the female body and the cultural ideology of femininity and masculinity. In order to understand the social worlds that people create in connection with sport and the experiences of women associated with sport, this chapter will outline the social theories which have arisen to assist in identifying sport issues. It will also examine feminist theories which address the question of what constitutes the oppression of women and their strategies for overcoming it. It aims to build a theoretical framework to underpin an analysis of the relationship of sport, women and the body in the Chinese context.

3.2 Social Theories of Sport

Jennifer Hargreaves (1994) argued that, although for a century or more, sport had occupied a central position in people's daily lives, until the 1970s, it had been a neglected area of historical and sociological analysis. Hargreaves explained that:

this was partly because mainstream ideas about sport were concerned with the physical body and partly because sport was popularly believed to have a “life of its own”, essentially separated from “important” aspects such as the world of work, politics and economics (Hargreaves, 1994: 6).

However, in the 1970s a growing number of academics belatedly turned their attention to the study of sport as a salient social phenomenon (Mangan and Park, 1987). People began to use historical analysis and empirical research to understand the societies in which sport existed, the social worlds that were created around sports and the experiences of individuals and groups associated with sport. In short, people were concerned with the deeper meanings of sport in particular cultures.

Sociology is a very useful tool when it comes to studying sports. It provides concepts, epistemologies, theoretical approaches and research methods to describe and understand behaviours, attitudes, interactions, conflicts and powers that occur in sport within a specific social and cultural context. The stimulation and dissemination of research concepts and theory relating to the sociological examination of sport have encouraged the rise of a new discipline, the sociology of sport. The sociology of sport provides us with a systematic analysis of sport issues, legitimising the framework of sport as a social science and cultural study. Understanding the sociological perspective of sport is the key to enabling the research to clarify and, to some extent, improve our knowledge of sport and how it relates to society and culture. Using the sociological perspective of sport, this thesis needs to examine Chinese sport in terms of its social, political and economic significance. The research on the relationships of Chinese sport and its economic, political and cultural background beg the question as to why Chinese sport is organised in particular ways, why different groups ascribe different meanings to sport and sport participation, and who benefits from the organisation and the definition of sport in Chinese society. In order to answer these questions, we initially need to understand what sport is and how it relates to society.

3.2.1 Defining Sport from a Sociological Perspective

Sport is a highly ambiguous term having different meanings for various people. In the West, some scholars in this field tend to emphasise that:

sports are institutionalised competitive activities that involve rigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by participants motivated by personal enjoyment and external rewards (Coakley, 2001: 20).

This definition puts sport in a physical and psychological framework. In the context of Chinese traditional culture, sport is translated into *tiyu*, which consists of two characters: *ti* refers to the body and *yu* means to 'raise, cultivate or educate', so *tiyu* means education or training of the body (CSHPES, 1989). This concept of sport was originally adopted by the Chinese military to train soldiers in order to improve their physiques and cultivate their fighting spirit (Hong and Tan, 2003: 190). This definition reveals the link between sport and body culture as a whole.

Adam Ferguson (1767) was the first to talk about sport as a necessary component of civic life. Writing in the 18th century, Ferguson viewed sport as a type of collective ceremony through which community solidarity could be demonstrated (Ferguson, 1767). Ferguson's understanding of sport went beyond the definition of sport as physical movement, psychological needs or body training. He had seen the social meanings of sport. Numerous developments had undoubtedly contributed to defining sport. John Loy (1979) in his article 'The Nature of Sport: A Definitional Effort' developed a definition of sport with multiple dimensions. He defined sport as, first, an actual game of occurrence or events; second, an institutionalised game; third, a social institution; and fourth, a social situation. Loy elaborated this definition by saying that the nature of sport was *physical activities* in relation to the human being's natural demands as well as social requirements. He also applied Smelser's point of view (1963) and considered that sport was an *abstract entity* which has been institutionalised by distinctive enduring patterns of culture and social structure combined into a single complex, the elements of which include values, norms, sanctions, knowledge and social positions. In addition, Loy's definition attributed social dimensions to sport. According to Loy, sport as *social institution* referred to

sport order which 'was composed of organisations in society which organise, facilitate, and regulate human action in sports situations' (Loy, 1979: 45). This concept contributes to a macro-analysis of the social significance of sport and can make reference to sport in a historical perspective. Sport as a social situation consists of any social context wherein individuals are involved with sport. In Loy's opinion, although there are many kinds of sport situations, most might be conceptualised as *social systems*. Theodore Caplow (1964) simply defined a social system as 'a set of persons with an identifying characteristic plus a set of relationships established among these persons by interaction' (p.1). Defining sport as a social system assists sociologists in analysing why human beings get involved in sport, what effect their involvement has on other aspects of their social environment and to what degree they are involved.

In addition to the concepts of sport as a social institution (organisation) and situation (system), some sociologists have extended the definition as a part of social and cultural life. They define sports as *cultural practices*. In their opinion, culture consists of a way of life that people created in particular society. Like other cultural practices,

sport is a human creation that comes into being as people struggle over what is important and how things should be done in their groups and societies (Coakley, 2001: 3).

Regarding sport as a cultural practice implies that sport has different forms and meanings from one place to another and is changed over time. It has historical and *social constructions*, which, in the other words, 'are activities to give human beings form and meaning as they live their lives with one another.' (Coakley, 2001: 3)

Sport has figured in contemporary traditions of social and political thoughts such as feminism, postmodernism and cultural studies. Research on sport, in turn, have contributed to an understanding of contemporary sociological themes such as the body, globalisation, religion, consumption, nationalism and cultural identity. From a sociological perspective, sport is a social phenomenon and a cultural practice. It is defined, organised and integrated into one's social life and determined through social interaction within a cultural context. Understanding sport with a sociological perspective is the basis of the theoretical framework. It contributes to the analysis of

the social contexts of Chinese modern sport systems and how those contexts are influenced by sport. It also helps us to understand Chinese cultures that are created in connection with sport and body culture and the experiences of Chinese women.

In this section, I examined the general principle of sociological views on sport. However, when engaging in the research, particular social theories are required to identify the issues, interpret the findings and uncover the deeper meanings underpinning the phenomena. Subsequently, I shall review the social theories that have been applied to this study.

3.2.2 Functionalist Theory

The theme of functionalist theory was derived from Emile Durkheim. It emphasises that sociology is concerned with the impact that large-scale structures of society have on the thoughts and actions of individuals. Social factors, in Durkheim's terms, are both cultural norms and social structures that are external to and constrain and regulate social actors (Durkheim, 1951). Social factors are invested with coercive power, which enable them to impose their influence on individuals. The individual is born into a continuous social system and acts accordingly to the 'script' laid down by society. The values, institutions and culture of society shape actions and roles. These are acquired in the process of socialisation (Jarvie and Maguire, 1994).

Functionalism is often referred to as a 'consensus' theory because it does not address the issue of conflict in society; rather it projects an ideal picture of harmonious social relationships (McIntosh, 1997). The starting point of functionalism is that all societies have certain basic needs. Functional requirements must be met if a society is to survive. Functionalists are therefore concerned with the contribution of various parts of a society make towards those needs. Functionalism is concerned with the basic need and desirability for social order and stability to prevail in society. In explaining the basis of social order in societies, the starting point for functionalists is to look at whole societies and not the individual; they explore the ways in which the various parts which make up a society function to maintain social order.

Functionalist theory inspires discussions and research about how sport fits into social life and contributes to stability and social progress in organisations, communities and societies. For functionalists, sport is a social institution that transmits values to participants. It functions to maintain the larger society. However, according to functionalists, sport is not unique in this respect. Sport's contribution is related to other aspects of society. These include the family, education and religion. Functionalists regard sport first as a cultural subsystem of society which is seen to teach people the basic values and norms of the society in which they live and performs a useful 'socio-emotional' function. Second, social practices can integrate members into society through 'collective representations'; third, through its dominant ethos, sport also reinforces the learning of achievement orientation and assists in the learning of social roles (Jarvie and Maguire, 1994). In short, functionalist theory focuses attention on how sport helps to keep societies, communities, organisations and groups operating smoothly, as well as how it influences individuals to contribute to the social systems in which they participate (Coakley, 2001).

Using functionalist theory in the research can reflect the purposes and functions of sport in China. It contributes to exploring:

- why and how China promotes women's success at elite level of sport;
- why the Chinese government pays attention to women's sports activities at the grassroots;
- how the dominant discourse of Chinese society influences the image and character of women through the value of sport in society as a whole.

In conclusion, functionalist theory can provide a guide for analysing how social authority in China maintains social order and how the state achieves its political and social goals through enhancing and controlling women's participation in sport.

3.2.3 Conflict Theory

Whereas functionalism emphasises shared values and harmony, the conflict theory views society as a division of groups or classes and is interested in their conflict with

each other. Conflict theory is based on the ideas of Karl Marx, who is the creator of historical materialism. Marx's starting point is that history is not a record of wars, monarchs or great statesmen, but that it is rather a record of how individuals organise themselves to satisfy their material needs for food, shelter and clothing. From the simplest hunting society to the advanced industrial society, the production of material goods is characterised by two key features:

- 1, the forces of production, which include factories, land, capital, labour, machinery, scientific and technical knowledge.

- 2, the relations of production, which simply refers to the social relationships that people enter into for producing goods.

According to Marx, the forces and relations of production give rise to unequal and antagonistic social classes (Marx, 1906). In every society beyond primitive communism two classes may be distinguished: one is a ruling class; one or more are subject classes. The class position is determined by their relationship to the forces of production. It is the ownership or non-ownership of the forces of production that determines class position. Marx viewed society as a system of social structures and relationships that were shaped ultimately by economic forces. Marxist theory is concerned with 'class relations' and the studies of social relations focus on the consequence of social inequality and the processes of change in society. The main goal of conflict theory, similarly to functionalist theory, is to explain how society operates as a system. Unlike functionalist theory, conflict theory aims to show that progressive changes of society are possible only if people without the forces of production become aware of the need for change and then take action to make radical changes in the organisation of economy and society (Adam and Sydie, 2001).

According to conflict theory, sport is organised and sponsored by those with economic power in an effort to affirm the capitalist values of competition, production and consumption. Conflict theory has inspired the debate and research about how sport perpetuates the power and privilege of elite groups in society. It also puts stress on how sport serves as tools of economic exploitation and oppression (Coakley and Dunning, 2002). Marxists point out that, in a capitalist society, sports workers, with their labour power to sell and be sold, are different from other active agents in the

labour market. Although sport is potentially a creative, expressive and meaningful avenue of human development, professional sports are highly regimented, restrictive and controlled, not least by management. Capitalist sport is characterised as alienating athletes from the activity of sport as work. The dimension of alienation deals with how the sports players help to create the structure which actually works against them or their interests. The lack of control over the product of their own labour, argued by Marxists, leads to alienation (Jarvie and Maguire, 1994).

In the process of the Chinese commercialisation of sport, conflict theory can assist the research on sport by supplying an economic perspective on

- how sport contributes to the existence of socioeconomic inequality in society;
- how commercialisation changes sport and influences gender relationships in society.

In conclusion, conflict theory has been instrumental in calling attention to important economic issues in sport and to forms of inequality that create conflicts and tensions in society as a whole. Applying conflict theory to the research focuses attention on how sports reflect and perpetuate the unequal distribution of power and economic resources in society.

3.2.4 Interactionist Theory

If we regard functionalist theory and conflict theory as macro-sociology, interactionism is a form of micro-sociology. The interactionist perspective tends to concentrate upon relatively small-scale levels of social interaction (between individuals, small social groups and so forth). It focuses on issues related to meaning, identity, social relationship and subculture. Interactionist theory derives from Max Weber's action theory, which perceives sociology as a comprehensive science of social actions (Weber, 1968). Its initial theoretical focus is on the subjective meaning that humans attach to their actions in their interactions with one another within specific social contexts. According to Weber, a human being is capable of conscious thought and self-awareness. Human action is not simply a reaction to external stimuli,

but the result of the meanings, theories, motives and interpretations brought into a social situation by the individual (Weber, 1968). Social reality is a 'constantly emergent' property, not something fixed and immutable. Gorge Simmel developed the action theory into interactionist theory. In his opinion, society is not a 'thing', a reified total outside human consciousness. Society is only the synthesis or general term for the totality of specific interactions; it is identical with the sum of social relations (Simmel, 1971). Thus Simmel stresses forms of interaction between active human beings. For Simmel such interaction is a complex and dynamic process. It involves the expression of meanings in a densely multi-layered reciprocal exchange between knowledgeable and social actors (Jarvie and Maguire, 1994). According to interactionist theory, human beings do not simply respond in an automatic fashion to the world around them. Instead, they actively make decisions about the impact their behaviour will have on their lives, the people around them, and the social world in which they live. In other words, the theory emphasises that it is human beings that interact with each other and create the norms, roles, relationships and structures that make up society.

The interactionist perspective on the relationship of society and individuals implies that our ability to reflect on and assess our decisions and actions enables us to develop a sense of who we are and how we connect to the social world. The sense of who we are in the social world is our identity. Identity is a basis of self-direction and self-control in our lives. It is the key factor as people interact with each other and construct their social worlds (Aboulafia, 1991). The interactionist theory leads to the rise of qualitative research methods, which require seeing the world through the eyes of people, who observe, interview and interact with social phenomena and trying to understand social phenomena from inside and the perspectives of people themselves (MacKinnon, 1994). Qualitative methods are the best methods for understanding how people define situations and use those definitions to form their own identities and make choices about their behaviour. It has been comprehensively used in social science research (Burgess, 1984).

As far as sport is concerned, interactionist theory focuses on the meanings and interactions associated with sport and sport participation. Its common goal is to reconstruct and describe the reality that exists in the minds of athletes, coaches,

spectators and others who are involved with sport in society. Interactionist theory can help analyse how people come to define themselves and be defined by others as sportsmen or sportswomen; how people give meaning to and derive meaning from their experiences in sport; what are the characteristics of sport; how those characteristics are created by people involved in sports and how they influence identity and behaviour on and off the field (Coakley, 2001). In summary, interactionist research provides vivid descriptions of sport experiences, which we can apply to understand behaviour and social life (Donnelly and Coakley, 1999).

Interactionist theory inspires the research about the experiences of Chinese women and how they gain self-realisation and social identity through participation in sport. It also contributes to an understanding of the complexity of women's participation in sport in terms of how Chinese women associate with sport, define situations through their relationships with other social factors such as careers, marriages and families.

3.2.5 Critical Theory

Critical theories focus primarily on explanations of culture, power and social relationships. Critical theories consist of various approaches designed to understand where power comes from, how it operates in social life and how it changes as people struggle over many issues that affect their lives and their relationships with each others (McDonald and Birrell, 1999; Tomlinson, 1998). Unlike functionalist theory, people who use critical theory do not believe that it is possible to discover a universal explanation for social life. In contrast, they feel that such a goal inevitably leads us to ignore the diversity, complexity, contradictions and changes that are inherent in all forms of social life. Critical theory is also about action and political involvement. All forms of critical theory have grown out of a desire to identify issues and problems and to make social life fairer, more democratic and open to diversity (Bronner and Kellner, 1990).

According to critical theory, sport is not only a reflection of society, but the site where society and culture is produced and reproduced. Critical theory recognises that, first, sports can have both positive and negative effects on participants, that people define and create sport in their own lives, and that sport is involved in either reproducing

culture or standing in opposition to the dominant ideology and forms of social relations on society (Coakley, 2001). Second, critical theory conceives that sport changes with historical conditions and new developments in government, education, the media, religion and family. It also changes according to new ideas about masculinity and femininity, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and physical ability. Furthermore, sport changes with new narratives and discourses that offer visions of culture and social life, which people use to make sense of the world around them (Coakley, 2001). Third, the intention of research based on critical theory is to expose how the structure, organisation and meaning of sport vary with the complex and constantly changing relationships in and between groups possessing different levels of power and resources in a particular culture at a particular point of time.

Critical theory is a general category. This section just gives a brief general description of the value of critical theory and its application into sport. In fact, critical theory has many branches, including neo-Marxist theory, hegemony theory and cultural studies, postmodernism and feminist theory. I shall apply a feminist critical perspective to examine how men possess and utilise power and resources to control women's participation in sport by shaping their bodies physically and mentally. Critical thinking is the key to this research in order to construct the analytical argument assessing the institution and ideology of sport in China, and to give voice to the experience of Chinese women in sport and society.

Although different theories have different views and focuses on sport, they all realise that sport is a social phenomenon and cultural practice, which can help us to understand Chinese sport in the complexities of social, economic, political and cultural transformation. Functionalist theory provides an explanation for positive consequences associated with female sports involvement in the live of individuals as well as the political purpose of the state. Conflict theory assists in identifying serious problems in sport commercialisation and explains how the variety of sport groups is formed by social class in relation to their economic conditions. Interactionist theory suggests that an understanding of women's sport requires an understanding of the meanings, identities and interactions of women with their sport. Given that sport is connected with social relations and cultures in complex and diverse ways, critical

theories can help explore gender power and social resources in the Chinese sports system.

Table 3.1 Summery and Comparison: Social Theories of Sport and Their Contributions to the Research

Social theories	Assumptions about society	Perspectives on sport	Contributions to the research
Functionalist theory	Social order is based on consensus and shared values, which hold all the interrelated parts of society together. All social systems tend towards a state of balance.	Sport is valuable social institution that benefits society as well as individuals in society. It is a source of inspiration on both personal and social levels.	How does social authority in China maintain social order and achieve its political social goals through enhancing and controlling women’s participation in sport?
Conflict theory	Social order is based on economic interests and the use of economic power to exploit labour. Social class shapes social structures and relationships.	Sport is a form of physical activity that is distorted by the needs of capital. It is a tool of economic exploitation and oppression.	How does commercialisation change sport and perpetuate the gender inequality in the distribution of power and economic resources?
Interactionist theory	Social order is created from the bottom up through intentional social interaction.	Sport is a form of culture created through social interaction. Sport participation is grounded in the decisions made by people in connection with their identities and their relationships.	How do Chinese women experience sport associated with their careers, marriages and families and how do they gain the social identity by participating in sport?
Critical theories	Social order is negotiated through struggles over ideology, representation and power. Social life is full of diversity, complexities and contradictions.	Sport is socially constructed and a site where culture is produced reproduced and transformed. Sport is cultural practice that represses and empowers people.	How does the Chinese sport system vary with complex and constantly changing gender relationships?

From focusing on the physical body to paying attention to social culture, the study of sport involves keeping in step with society and by so doing has formed its own principles and perspectives. Social theories play an important role in this process and lead to various ways of understanding sport issues and controversies. Different social theories have different contributions to make to the analysis of sport as social phenomenon and cultural practice. Since the women's movement has developed around the world and the feminist spirit has been on the rise, opportunities for women in sport have rapidly expanded and become an important arena for women fighting for their rights in practice and in building their own power in academia. In the following sections, feminist theories and their perspectives into sport will be discussed.

3.3 Feminist Frameworks and Women's Sport

Feminism is both 'theory' and 'practice' (Letherby, 2003). It provides a perspective or framework to recognise the world. Just as there exist different orientations of social theories towards sport, there exist different models of feminism, each with a unique image of women, a set of explanations for the source of women's oppression as a social being and a vision of their experience in sport. To better understand Chinese women's participation in sport, first of all we need to examine feminist theories and compare the different branches then select appropriate models and apply them to the research.

3.3.1 Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism is the result of the emergence of liberal philosophy, which raised the demand for democracy and political liberties. Liberal political theory is grounded on the conception of human beings as essentially rational agents. According to liberals, rationality is a mental capacity as a property of individuals rather than groups (Scheman, 1983), and is possessed in approximately equal measure at least by all men. However, it is denied that women are fully rational agents. Aristotle believed

that 'the woman has (a deliberative faculty) but without authority' (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1 13. 1260 a13). Consequently, 'the male is by nature superior and the female is inferior; the one rules and the other is ruled' (Aristotle, *Politics*, 15. 1254 b13-14). Against this point of view, Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) in *A Vindication of Rights of Women*, argued that women had the potential for full rationality and were as capable as men of complete moral responsibility. The fact that women did not always realise this potential was due to the fact that they were deprived of education and confined to the domestic sphere (Korsmeyer, 1973-1974).

Consistently over the centuries, feminists have demanded that the prevailing liberal ideals should also be applied to women. The framework of liberal feminism saw the root of women's oppression as being caused by the lack of equal civil rights and educational opportunities for women. In the 18th century, they argued that women as well as men had natural rights; in the 19th century, they employed utilitarian arguments in favour of equal rights for women under the law; and in the 20th century, with the development of liberal theory and the welfare state, liberal feminists demanded that the state should actively pursue a variety of social reforms in order to ensure equal opportunities for women (Jaggar, 1988). They believed that reform could be achieved by the extension of political, legal and educational opportunities to women. They assumed that once these rights and chances were gained, all women – regardless of their race, ethnicity, age, social class – would have equal access to these opportunities and would be equally rewarded for their talents (Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983).

As well as opposing laws that established different rights for women and men, liberal feminists have also promoted the prohibition of various kinds of discrimination against women. In order to eliminate this discrimination, many contemporary liberal feminists wish to erase the distinction of gender. One common way of referring to the ideal of contemporary liberal feminism is to construct an androgynous society. According to this ideal, members of an androgynous society would be physiologically male or female, but they would not be likely to show the same extreme differences of 'masculine' or 'feminine' psychology as those characteristics are defined. In other words, 'there would not be current extreme contrast between logical, independent, aggressive, courageous, insensitive and emotionally inexpressive men and intuitive,

dependent, compassionate, nurturing and emotional women' (Jaggar, 1988: 39). Liberal feminists argue that boys and girls should receive the same educational opportunities and no attempt should be made to impose those character traits that are considered traditionally to be masculine or feminine. Instead, 'every individual should be free to develop, in any combination, any psychological qualities and virtues' (Jaggar, 1988: 39).

Since the liberal values of individual dignity, equality, autonomy and self-fulfilment are applied to women's liberation, liberal feminists have claimed that it is necessary to expand sports opportunities for women and foster an environment that is more supportive of women developing their physical selves (Costa and Guthrie, 1994). Liberal feminists hailed the concept of equal opportunity for training, facilities and practice as achieving the ultimate goal of gender equity in sport. They also required physical education to be balanced between men and women in both international and domestic terms. Legal reform and the enhancement of educational opportunity were major parts of the liberal feminist agenda.

However, liberal feminists simply aim at reforming rather than transforming existing social structures. They ignore the fact that equality of opportunity cannot be introduced into a society that is structured to allow certain groups to retain their social and economic advantage over other groups. As a result, women in sport and physical education would have to passively adopt the patriarchal ideology and male model of sport (Costa and Guthrie, 1994). Thus other feminists argue that the deep prejudice against women in sport cannot be eliminated simply by a change in the law. They must be combated by the structures of cultural and social life.

3.3.2 Marxist Feminism

For Marxists, the notion of class is the key to understanding all social problems, including the issues of women's oppression. Contrary to liberal theory, Marxism offers a devastating critique of the capitalist system. One of the most fundamental contrasts between liberalism and Marxism is their different conception of human nature. Marxists do not look at the human essence as a capacity for rationality that may be embodied in a variety of forms. Rather, Marx claimed that praxis (i.e.,

physical labour that transforms the material world to satisfy human needs) is the essence of human activity. Marxists view human beings as one biological species among many. This means that in order to survive, humans must draw on the resources of the non-human world. This is because human beings have many biologically based needs such as food, drink, shelter and clothing; humans can exist only in a world in which these needs may be satisfied. However, unlike animals, humans do not simply utilise what the world provides in order to fulfil their needs; they also transform the world (Jaggar, 1988). Marx identified the freedom of the human species in terms of conscious, productive activity that includes both physical and mental components (Costa and Guthrie, 1994). According to Marx, in pursuing individual freedom, two social preconditions should exist: the extensive development of the means of production and the elimination of forced labour that has characterised class society. Marx argued that all human history was a history of class struggle. Consequently, the full development of human nature and elimination of class oppression could be achieved only through a revolutionary transformation of the mode of production. That is what Marx called 'class struggle'.

Marxists' interest in women focuses particularly on women's situation under capitalism, in which productive activity is organised around the division between the working class and the capitalist class. Although Marx himself did not undertake a thorough investigation of women's situation in capitalist society, his close friend and successor Friedrich Engels, in his article *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1972) discussed the sexual division of labour under capitalism as the source of oppression of women. He argued that women's subordination was a form of oppression, resulting from the institution of a class society and maintained up to the present because it served the interests of capital (Jaggar, 1988). Marxist feminists view women's oppression in a capitalist context as rooted in their exclusion from the public realm of economic production. Engels believed that women of capitalist class were more oppressed than working-class women. Ergo, the entry of working-class women into the labour market would make them independent of working-class men in a way that bourgeois women were not independent of capitalist men. Thus working-class women were more likely than bourgeois women both to feel and to be equal with the men of their class. Marxist feminists argue that liberation will come primarily from women's full entry into the workforce. That means that unless women gain

economic independence, they cannot really hope to achieve equality with men in society (Wang, 2001b).

Marxist feminism is the theoretical basis of the Chinese women's movement since 1949. It has deeply influenced Chinese women's experience and status in Communist China. Understanding Marxist feminism is the key to analysing Chinese policy on women in a socialist society, something which has profoundly and widely determined Chinese women's participation in sport. According to the assumption of Marxist feminism, the right of women to participate in sport would be a natural development of the right of all persons to work. The opportunities for all women to enter the realm of sport bring about the production of physical achievements for the glorification of the socialist state. For Marxist feminists, the international stage is the place for the recognition of the achievements of women. They claim that such achievements on the world stage are the direct result of the elimination of class privilege and the consequent opportunity for all women to receive expert coaching and technological assistance (Costa and Guthrie, 1994). In addition, Marxist feminists undoubtedly would claim that the notion of an 'ideal' body image is a homophobic reaction to strong and powerful women. However some other feminists complain that Marxists generally consider women's oppression less important than that of workers (Costa and Guthrie, 1994).

3.3.3 Radical Feminism

Radical feminism is a contemporary phenomenon generated by the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s (Jaggar, 1988). Radical feminists do not believe, as do the Marxists, that the elimination of social classes will ensure women's equality, nor do they accept the liberal position that the equalisation of legal and educational opportunities will ensure all women an equal chance at self-actualisation. Rather, radical feminists view patriarchy as the primary form of domination and the source of women's oppression (Thomason, 2001). Radical feminists conceive of contemporary society as a system organised in a way that accords privilege to men as a group and allows them to have systematic coercive power over women. To legitimise domination, men make culture constructs and ideologies that define women

as inferior (De Beauvoir, 1952). Patriarchal ideologies define women in a way specific to their sex, that is, as women whose specific function is to gratify male sexual desires and to bear and raise children (Jaggar, 1988). In order to uncover and eradicate this systematic or root cause of women's oppression, radical feminists regularly produce writings of striking power and originality. But they are not identified by adherence to an explicit and systematic political theory. Instead, as Jaggar (1988) argues, they are part of a grassroots movement, a flourishing women's culture concerned with providing feminist alternatives in literature, music, spirituality, health service, sexuality and even in employment and technology.

Radical feminists make an effort to explain women's bodies as, in their opinion, the source of their oppression – that is, as natural mothers and sex objects. Hence they claim that women's freedom must be grounded in having full control over their bodies. Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) viewed the root of women's oppression in biology itself, where enforced childbearing functions keep women physically dependent on men and limit their autonomy. In contrast to this emphasis on fundamental biological differences between women and men that result in women's oppression, other radical feminists view sex differences as social constructions, challenging women's nature as a biological given and sex difference in itself (Costa and Guthrie, 1994). Thus they have located the source of women's oppression in compulsory heterosexuality and have called for 'a women-identified existence in which women committed themselves to other women for political, emotional, physical and economic support' (Bunch, 1978: 136).

In the radical feminist reordering of society, the dominant model of sport, structured to promote patriarchy, needs to be transformed and the control of the organisation of sport, which is grounded in traditional models of male dominance, needs to be dismantled. Moreover, radical feminists argue that the use of sport to showcase political ideology should cease. According to radical feminism, physical activities that promote overall somatic awareness and skill would be instituted in school, from preschool through to college, as well as in settings such as the workplace and convalescent homes. In women's sport the emphasis would be placed on fitness and wellness across one's lifespan. Competition would take on new meanings and be used to motivate and encourage excellence, but not at someone else's expense (Costa and

Guthrie, 1994). In conclusion, the major change in women's sport under radical feminism would be the emphasis on the exhilarating experiences of physical accomplishment.

Radical feminists refuse the rigid notion of 'body beautiful' which is the focus of aerobics instruction and some sports. They argue that women athletes be encouraged to be the subject of discussion in sports mass media. Women of all races, abilities, sexual preference and generations should participate together in activities designed to encourage female bonding and respect for each other. It is also likely that if participation with effective instruction for all triumphed, women's physical disadvantages would be diminished.

Radical feminists have much to celebrate. Their discourses and actions have helped raise our consciousness and highlight the power of patriarchy in women's lives. Additionally, radical feminists have revealed an alternative explanation for women's oppression, one grounded in the social definition of their bodies and sexuality. They help us understand that women's oppression is intimately related to practices such as sexual harassment. They also help explain how the control of women's bodies is used by men and male institutions. However, other feminists have offered the criticism that radical feminists universalise women's oppression and patriarchy without considering the socio-historical context. For insisting that the major source of women's oppression is deeply-rooted sexism requiring the radical transformation of both personal and social existence, radical feminists are accused of 'going too far' (Morgan, 1977: 8).

3.3.4 Socialist Feminism

The framework of socialist feminism attempts to bridge the gap between Marxist and more radical approaches. They argue that both economic inequalities and sexism should be seen as fundamental and equally important forms of oppression, neither having clear predominance over the other (Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983). Unlike liberals, they stress the greater struggle by women from different races, ethnic groups and economic classes in gaining equal opportunity; unlike Marxists, they do not assume that a classless society will eliminate male privilege; unlike the radicals, they refuse to consider economic oppression as secondary in importance to women's

oppression. Socialist feminists see the oppression of women as a dual problem based on dual-systems, namely inequalities of economic class and institutionalised gender. They are committed to the Marxist notion that human nature is created and changed historically through interactions among human biology, society and physical environment, which in turn are mediated through human labour (praxis) (Jaggar, 1988). Socialist feminists recognise that the differences between women and men are not biologically given; rather they are socially constructed and therefore changeable. That means that women's freedom cannot be achieved by isolated individual action without a complete reconstruction of society. Socialist feminists realise class inequalities to be abolished if all women, not just the more advantaged, are to gain any enhancement of their rights. They also call for the abolition of patriarchal forms of cultural and social life, such as the nuclear family, enforced heterosexuality, polarised sex roles and other forces that maintain male privileges even in economically more egalitarian societies (Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983).

As Costa and Guthrie (1994) suggest, sport is a perplexing realm for socialist feminists to conceptualise, particularly in the light of the collapse of many socialist regimes in the early 1990s. According to socialist feminists, sport both in capitalist and socialist countries has been shown to be both hierarchical and male-dominated. They argue that patriarchy promotes sexism and controls the sporting experience for women through formal sports organisational bodies and informal sports practice dependent on male bonding. To eliminate male dominance and hierarchical structures, a new world order in sport would have to be created. This new world order, a goal which socialist feminists struggle for, would divide the means of production, training techniques and facilities evenly among the people of the world. Consequently, socialist feminists would strive to deconstruct existing sport policies and practices so that women could be brought from the margins to the centre of sport. Moreover, sport for women under socialist feminism would be structured according to the dictates of the psychological and health benefits accrued (Costa and Guthrie, 1994). In other words, women's experiences, needs and interests would dictate the structure and function of their sporting and exercise experiences. Socialist feminists have made a disciplined effort to develop a theory of comprehensive explanatory power, that is, one that attempts to weave into the analysis all the oppressive aspects of patriarchy and capitalism. In this respect, as Costa and Guthrie suggest, 'socialist feminist

theorising is multidimensional and its liberatory possibilities are limitless' (1994: 248).

3.3.5 Materialist Feminism

Materialist feminism, which was developed by Christine Delphy (1977, 1981, 1984), argues that sexual inequality is primary and more fundamental than class inequality. Thus women's oppression cannot be regarded less important than class oppression (Abbott and Wallace, 1997). In the perspective of materialist feminists, although housewives may differ in their standards of living because of their husbands' social status, their domestic labour is taken from them by men. It is analogous to the goods produced by male manual workers are taken away from them by their employers (Abbott and Wallace, 1997).

Some materialist feminists argue that to give birth is not a biological process but is a socio-historical construction of 'forced production' (Wittig, 1979; Guillaumin, 1995). This has resulted in the creation of two biological sexes. Society, therefore, is structured around the belief that there are two polar opposite sexes, men and women. Materialist feminists argue that women are a class in themselves because the category 'woman', as well as the category of 'man', is a political and economic one. Therefore, the aim of women's liberation is to eliminate the sex distinction itself.

By using materialist feminist perspective, Nancy Hartsock (1984) provides a feminist critique of the male-constructed notion of body experience and body image. She argues women are more immersed in the material world than men because of their ongoing and continuous involvement in the devalued sphere of household, reproductive and child-raising activities. Women's involvement in reproduction, child-raising and housework is regarded by the capitalism and patriarchy as noncommodity-producing labour and hence not worthy of wages and leisure time. Therefore, the female bodily experience encounters rigid separation of sexes and bodily boundaries. She claims that all women share similar experiences of oppression because of their biological and reproductive capacities.

Based on materialist feminist theory, some sports feminists have also analysed the unequal opportunities for women to take part in sports and leisure activities (Henderson et al., 1989, 1996). Hargreaves (1994) argues that men's labour outside the home is highly valued, so men have the right to engage freely in leisure activities so that they can return fresh to their job. In contrast, women's labour is done at home and though physically demanding, time-consuming and socially essential, is valued less. This situation restricts them in going out to take part in leisure and sports activities. Kelly (1983) indicates that women's domestic role as wives and mothers constrains the forms, meanings and values of women's sports activities. Since some women take part in sport for sharing leisure times and sports games with their children and family, their sports activities have reinforced their domestic responsibilities. In this sense, women cannot achieve equality in the area of sport and leisure (Henderson et al., 1989).

3.3.6 Black Feminism

The Second Wave feminists have employed the term 'difference' to point to the inequalities and disadvantages that women experience when compared to men. More recently the term has acquired another connotation referring to the 'differences' between women themselves (Letherby, 2003: 49). Black feminists were the pioneer in this approach. Black feminists argued that the issues of ethnic difference, racialisation and racism are ignored in feminist theories and research (Abbott and Wallace, 1997). Black feminists have argued that the current feminist theories which are normally represented by white feminists cannot apply to the unique experiences of Black women. Black women are 'the Other' (Abbott and Wallace, 1997). Therefore, it is necessary to recognise that the experience of Black women is different from that of white women. They share with white women a history of patriarchal oppression and share with Black men a history of racial discrimination and abuse (Hill Collins, 1990).

The Black feminist perspective reminds us that culture, class, gender, age, religion, nationality can all have an impact on women's lives (Letherby, 2003). Therefore, it is important to examine Chinese women's sport in their historical, cultural and ethical contexts. In Chinese cities, women within different social class, marital status and age

have different sport and leisure opportunities and face different challenges during the social transformation.

3.3.7 Postmodern Feminism

The term of 'postmodernism' is best applied to the conditions of contemporary life rather than assigned to a particular theory, although some theories, such as post-structuralism are better adapted than others to express the confusions and contradictions of life in a postmodern era. Postmodern theories abandon explanatory goals and argue there can no longer be any attempt to describe, analyse or explain reality in an objective or scientific way (Baudrillard, 1988).

Central to postmodern theories is the recognition of difference – race, sex, age – and their subsequent deconstruction. They reject both the humanist (modern) idea that the subject exists, as it is, in a state of nature, that there is 'a doer behind the deed' and that we are purely constituted by actions. Postmodern theories argue that the doer is invariably constructed in and through the deed. 'Things' have a predicursive existence and they acquire a social and historical meaning only in discourse (Abbott and Wallace, 1997).

Postmodern feminists reject the naturalism of biology. They argue that sex differences do not exist before being brought into consciousness through language. There is no natural pre-linguistic existence and a reality outside our understanding (Abbott and Wallace, 1997). According to postmodern feminists, far from being a tool for our self-expression, language is reconceived as the primary means through which our consciousness is structured. This way of thinking also decentres the notion of the truth. There is no truth, but provisional truth (Birrell, 2002). Truth is what the discourse allows to be true and knowledge is constructed through discourse. They believe that all knowledge is historically and culturally specific, the product of particular discourses. The discourses create knowledge also create power (Abbott and Wallace, 1997). It is the power that names, defines and gives meaning to reality. As a result, some people, ideas and things have more worth in society than others. For example, in sports, they argue, adjectives like fast, hard and male have more status

than slow, soft and female (Costa and Guthrie, 1994). Those who create or control symbol systems in society can use these systems to maintain relations of power that favour their positions in society.

Some sports feminists utilise discourse to analyse women's situations in sport (Birrell, 1988; Hall, 1988; Hargreaves, 1990; Talbot, 1988). They provide a powerful critique of the relationship between power and knowledge within sports system. They have discussed how sport is constructed by masculinity-dominated discourses and maintained male privilege in sport; how women are represented in the media coverage of sport and how those representations reproduce dominant ideas about femininity in society and how sports participation is related to gendered ideas about physicality, sexuality and the body (Costa and Guthrie, 1994). They argue that the meaning, organisation and purpose of sport are grounded in the values and experiences of men and are defined to celebrate the attributes and skills associated with masculinity in society (Birrell, 2002). Sport, therefore, has been organised to reproduce cultural ideas that work to the advantage of men with power and influence in society (Coakley, 2001). Therefore, postmodern feminism provides a critique to evaluate women's sport in contemporary society. It is closely related to body theories, which will be further discussed in the next section.

I have examined seven different versions of feminism that have emerged over the past four decades in the West. Despite their differences, feminists have many beliefs and values in common. First, all feminists believe that what exists now is gender inequality and we still live in a patriarchal world. Second, centrally related to this inequality is the social classification of gender, which has been used to construct unequal power relations between women and men. Third, all feminists believe that to accomplish gender equality, it is necessary to bring women's needs, values and interests from the margin to the centre (Costa and Guthrie, 1994). Each of these feminist frameworks has its benefits in describing women's oppression and prescribing changes in certain aspects of sexism in relation to women's participation in sport. They also have developed theoretical and empirical critiques concerning the deeply gendered structure and values of the world of sport (Hong, 1997).

Among these feminist frameworks, socialist feminism has been recognised as 'the least unidimensional and clearest approximation of the complexities of sexism and a

social phenomenon' (Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983: 17). In addition, the socialist feminist approach is more suitable for analysing Chinese women than other theories in the context of Chinese traditional culture and Communist policy. Firstly, socialist feminists agree with radical feminists and criticise the patriarchal form of culture and social life which constructs the whole of society, maintaining male privilege and supremacy within sport. Secondly, socialist feminists accept Marxist concepts and stress that economic dependence is the source of the oppression of women, determining their roles and status in society and giving them insufficient opportunities to participate in sport.

In the case of China, prior to 1840, Confucianism, the leading culture, as a controlling instrument of patriarchal society, played a crucial role in the construction of the social order, limiting women's participation in sports by designating them as naturally weak (Hong, 1979). The distinct images of masculinity and femininity as defined by Confucianism hid an ideology that determined Chinese women's behaviour and influenced their values towards sport. Since 1949, under the leadership of the CCP, the Marxist argument about women's economic dependence has deeply and widely affected the Chinese women's liberation movement. It has established the theoretical core of Chinese women's studies since 1949 and has impacted on women's participation in sport in the PRC. In conclusion, the application of a socialist feminist framework can assist the research by providing the socio-cultural and political-economic perspectives, which can reflect the complicated gender relationships that are transforming Chinese society and thereby revealing the practical implications of the female body in the changing sport system.

3.4 Body Theories and Women's Sport

Sport is a bridge by which the human body is connected to society. Sports studies have ranged from focusing on physical bodies to highlighting sport as a social phenomenon and cultural practice. However, as the 'labouring body has become a desiring body' (Turner, 1996: 2), which is a consequence of the profound and long-term transformation of Western industrial societies, sport has become a new platform for researchers to explore the social order and power which has emerged in the body

and is expressed by the body. After a long time struggling for women's liberation in terms of political, economic and domestic rights in society, it was feminists who put the body on the intellectual map (Hong, 2001a: 1). Feminists have demonstrated an increasing interest in the role of sport as a means of maintaining, shaping and transmitting bodily images and moral values. They have recognised that the female body in sport is a location for debate about the changing nature of ideology, power, social structures and cultural systems. They have argued that women's involvement in sport has symbolised women's desire for change and the liberation of their bodies has been, and is, an essential requirement for their wider physical, social, cultural, economic and political freedom (Hong, 2001a). Feminists have been aware that sport can be utilised as a political and cultural instrument for challenging and transforming oppressive forms of gender relations and the constraints of the female body (Hargreaves, 1994). This section will review body theories and feminist perspectives of the sporting body.

In the previous section I examined different feminist frameworks for looking at Western women's sports practices at the grassroots level and building the feminist rhetorical argument against male dominance in sport. In view of China's specific socio-cultural and political history, I have chosen the socialist feminist approach to explore the changes in Chinese women's participation in sport in the complexities of social transformation. Now I shall elaborate on body theories, which provide another perspective on women's participation in sport. As Kathy Davis (1997) has indicated, the past decade has marked an enormous upsurge of interdisciplinary interest in the body, both in academia and in popular culture. The body has represented hedonism, desire and enjoyment. With the emergence of 'second-wave' feminism in the late 1960s, feminists have brought the body to the forefront in their analyses of power relations within a critique of patriarchal society and the transformation of the role of women in the public sphere (Firestone, 1970; Mitchell, 1971; MacKinnon, 1982). Sport, one of the main arenas in which the body as a cultural artefact is displayed in public (Brownell, 1995), has been used by feminists to fight for women's physical, mental and cultural emancipation from male-dominated societies. This section will examine how body theories are utilised to interpret women's sport under male power in the Western world and in the Chinese history.

3.4.1 Body Theories and the Debates over the Female Body

According to the sociological understanding, the body is a vehicle for social practice. From this point of view, the human body has to be constantly and systematically produced, sustained and presented in everyday life. Therefore the body is best regarded as a potential that is realised and actualised through a variety of socially regulated activities or practices (Turner, 1996). On this basis, the body can only be understood in terms of everyday practices. Secondly, sociology conceptualises the body as a system of signs that is the carrier or bearer of social meaning and symbolism (Turner, 1996). This tradition of the analysis of the body has been elaborated and developed in the work of Mary Douglas (1970; 1978). In the work of Douglas, the human body is an important source of metaphor about the organisation and disorganisation of society. A third sociological approach to the body interprets the human body as a system of signs, which indicate and express power relationships. This point of view originated from Michel Foucault. For Foucault (1981), the power-effects of ideology are not to be seen in terms of the manipulation of the human subject as pure consciousness. Foucault argued that, in modern societies, power has a specific focus, namely the body. According to Foucault, the body is the primary site for the operation of modern forms of power which are not top-down and repressive, but rather, subtle, elusive and productive. Thus, the body as an object of power is produced in order to be controlled, identified and reproduced (Foucault, 1981). Foucault's understanding of body and power came to be seen more generally as a metaphor for critical discussions. It expands the knowledge of sexuality and subjectivity in terms of gender relations.

Sociological concepts of the body as social practice, social symbolism and power relationships have deeply influenced feminist perspectives on the body through fundamental debates about the relationships between sexual difference and sexual equality. Within feminism, there have been primarily two responses to women's bodily specificity. One argues for sexual equality regardless of biological differences. In other words, they argue that bodily difference legitimates social inequality as

unavoidable, normal or immutable. One celebrates and retains an essential sexual difference and believes that sexual difference is essential for understanding embodiment (Davis, 1997). The debate over sexual difference versus sexual equality was originally derived from the controversy between essentialism (or so-called biological determinism) and social constructivism through the discussion of whether a woman is born or made, and whether the female body is real or represented. Simone De Beauvoir (1952) answered this question and stated that 'women are made but not born'. This argument was initially intent on dispelling the doctrine of natural difference and showing that the differences between the sexes were socially rather than biologically constructed. Furthermore, influenced by Foucault's perspective on the body and power, feminists highlight the idea that the female body is constructed through a variety of discourses of power, such as medical, scientific, technological, sexual and sport. The meaning of discourse in this sense is 'the structured ways of knowing which are both produced in and the shapers of, culture' (Ransom, 1993: 123). The female body in this sense is a cultural ideology which is constructed by male discourse and in turn maintains male domination in society. Sharon R. Guthrie and Shirley Castelnovo (1994) specifically identify these feminising body practices as the 'feminine body beauty discourse'; a discourse aimed at shaping the feminine body to a particular size and shape with a set of gestures and movements that are restrictive, deferential and seductive. It is this feminising body beauty discourse that provides the social component of women's body images, which are subjectified through the discourses and practices of such things as fashion, fitness and beauty. The female body therefore, is symbolically deployed in discourses of power, which justify social inequality and power hierarchies.

However, not all feminists ignore the female body's biological distinction. The feminist scholars who take sexual difference as a starting point for exploring the specific features of feminine embodiment argue that approaches that ignore sexual differences, especially in embodiment, are rejected as falsely universalist and unable to do justice to the particularities of individuals' bodily experience (Davis, 1997). Embodiment is an individual's interaction with their body and through their body with the world around them (Davis, 1997). Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young (1989) have indicated that the emphasis on sexual differences in women's bodily experience not only provides insight into the materiality of feminine embodiment, but also

demonstrates that feminine embodiment is not simply oppressive but can be heretical and even empowering. Nancy Hartsock (1984), who identified herself as a materialist feminist believed that empowering women's body images and self-concepts through embodiment was one of the important steps that could lead to economic, political and social change. Furthermore, Dorothy Harris (1973) concluded that women's negative body images and permeable body boundaries could be positively enhanced through movement and sport activities. Her strategy for change assumed that more extensive, positive sport and movement experiences for women could transfer their negative body images. She accepted the valuation that a strong body boundary as a positive criterion for individual development was applicable to both women and men. Such a perspective implies that if women become more like men, or are given legal equality within the present socio-economic and political structures, their achievement potential can equal that of men (Guthrie and Castelnovo, 1994).

From those debates, it can be concluded that although the female body is the construction of a male-dominated society by various discourses of power, especially the beauty discourse of femininity, the image of the female body is not a fixed one but can be changed through embodiment practices. Sport is an important institution in the construction of male supremacy and patriarchal society. However, sport, as it defines the body's capabilities and skills, can also empower women and help them to expand their possibility for bodily emancipation (Hong, 1997). Therefore, understanding the female sporting body can help us uncover how the female body is oppressed by the power of sport and how it can be emancipated through positive participation in sport.

3.4.2 Understanding the Female Sporting Body

Since the women's liberation movement was initiated in the mid-1960s, sport as a vehicle for equal access in education and careers has extended opportunities for girls and women to achieve equality with men. On the back of this development, sports feminism emanated mainly from North America during the 1970s (Hargreaves, 1994). Confronting the reality of male dominance in sport and the marginalisation of female sport, sport feminists conducted a multifaceted analysis of women, gender and sex inequality in sport (Dong, 2003). In order to explain gender differences in the pattern

of sports socialisation and demonstrate how the dominant institutional forms of sport consolidated men's privileges, studies by sport feminists highlight re-conceptualising the female body to constitute a bridge over the debate between biological and cultural concepts of women's sport.

Firstly, informed by Foucault's argument about the body being used in the discourse of power, sport feminists criticise the concept of the female body as controlled by medical authority (Atkinson, 1987). Medical orthodoxy insisted woman was starkly different from the male of the species. 'Physically, she was frailer, her skull smaller, her muscles more delicate, her nervous system is different as well' (Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg, 1987: 14). These physical characteristics were regarded as an inevitable disadvantage for women's participation in sport. Although in the Victorian era, women's participation in sport was increased by encouraging women to do some proper physical exercise, their participation was still combined with a medicalised ideology of the female body. Sport feminists point out that the rise of women's physical education was sponsored by physicians who aimed to constitute a healthy body as the instrument to bear a healthy baby (Mangan and Park, 1987). Struggling against the traditional concept of female body and female exercise, sport feminists acknowledged women's physical weakness but refused to attribute it to an immutable law of nature. Rather, they saw the concept of female physical weakness as a cultural construction and a means of social control. In conclusion, in the nineteenth and twentieth century in Western countries, sport was used as a vehicle for defining and reinforcing the female body and was a subject for the debate between medical orthodoxy and feminists.

Secondly, Western sport feminists have emphasised the relationship between women's social role and women's physical exercise, which interacted with each other and impacted on the image of the female body. Before the Victorian era in Western societies, a woman's traditional role was defined largely by her childbearing capacity and her status was derived from that of male relatives (McCrone, 1987). 'When she married she was, in effect, given permission by her father to surrender her body and its precious virginity to her husband, and henceforth to do her duty by satisfying his desire and bearing his children' (McCrone, 1987: 97). Because women's function was claimed to be to bear babies, such transcendent responsibility made the individual

woman's personal ambition seem trivial indeed. Woman's role was daughter, wife and mother, and moreover the symbol of her husband's or her father's material success. Thus 'women's leisure activities actually defined her husband/father's social standing' (Hargreaves, 1987: 132). In addition, sport feminists perceived that a girl's physical education in school was in fact designed to strengthen a girl's social morality and value. Public schools emphasised that for girls, intellectual training was a first priority. The benefits of participation in games would improve girls' health, encourage mental dexterity, stimulate study and aid discipline and would impart valuable moral qualities, such as honour, loyalty, determination, resourcefulness and courage. In other words, 'games make girls able to evolve and preserve free institutions, and make them law-abiding and moderate' (McCrone, 1987: 113). Accordingly, in order to understand how the female body and women's sport are dominated by male authority – such as medical orthodoxy, religion or politics – sport feminists have suggested that it is crucial to clarify women's social role and their key functions in society.

Thirdly, against this female image of natural physical inferiority, the image of the female sporting body has grown rapidly since the early 1980s, along with the attention of the mass media (Hall, 1996). According to sport feminists, re-building women's bodies through sport is crucial to building women's status and gaining equality in society. However, the reality has been that for men, the sporting body in fields such as 'bodybuilding' appears to fulfil a need through the creation of a virile, hyper-masculine physique, to restore feelings of self-worth and self-control (Gillet and White, 1992; Klein, 1993; Hall, 1996); for women, Elizabeth Grosz (1994) argues, it has been much more difficult to attribute a singular goal or meaning to the sporting body. It might be possible to present women's sporting body in one of two ways: on the one hand, 'it may be part of an attempt to conform to stereotypical images of femininity'; on the other hand, 'it can be seen as an attempt to take on many male attributes in a mode of defiance against patriarchal attempts to render women physically weak and incapable' (Hall, 1996: 59). Take aerobics for example. Markula (1993) has indicated the aerobics practitioners' relationship to themselves proves the contrary: they fragment their meaning to conform to the socially ideal body image, but yet are integrated in the enjoyment of movement.

Sport feminist perspectives on the female body are implicated in the analysis of women's bodily experiences and embodied practices as well as in studies of how the female body is constructed in different cultures, social contexts and historical epochs. Chinese women have suffered a long history of oppression. It was originally reflected by the restrictions on the female body in footbinding. Footbinding was a physical tyranny and social constraint on Chinese women from ancient to modern times. It represented male domination and power by controlling the female body physically and mentally (Hong, 1997). Sport as a part of body culture in China is a very useful tool for examining Chinese women's bodies from religious, cultural and political perspectives in the new transformation of society. However, there were no specific studies on Chinese women and the female body from a sport perspective until Fan Hong's academic work, *Footbinding, Feminism and Freedom: The Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern China* (1997). This original book is concerned with women in China and the emancipation of their bodies between 1840 and 1949. It provides a valuable historical background to women's physical emancipation, a prerequisite of their later performance in modern sport. Its account of the evolution of Chinese women's sport not only fills in the gaps in previous male-centred historiography but also serves the purpose of revealing the historical struggle for women's access to, and success in, sport. Since 1949, Chinese women have been liberated from the physical tyranny of footbinding and encouraged to build masculine bodies, which were considered more egalitarian and homogeneous. Dong Jinxia (2003) examined the evolution of women's sport in the PRC and its complex relationship with culture, society, economics and politics. In her book *Women, Sport and Society in Modern China: Holding Up More than Half the Sky* (2003), she celebrated the great success of Chinese elite sportswomen in the international sport and tried to explore the social, economic, political and cultural factors that contributed to women's success in elite sport. She believed that Chinese women's stunning accomplishments in sport were an outcome of the combination of male dominance in the wider society with a much more equal environment in the sports community (Lu et al., 1995).

The successful female athletes and the images of the national heroine in elite sport have to a certain extent defined the picture of women and women's sport in China. However, the accomplishments of the elite female do not mean that women at the

grassroots level have achieved the same equal environment and resources to participate in sport; the heroine images of a few elite sportswomen do not necessarily mean that women beyond sport have emancipated their bodies physically, mentally and socially in China. Thus in order to portray gender relations in sports institutions and sports cultures – in fact the entire status of women in Chinese society since 1949 – we have to examine women's participation in sport in greater depth. First, in order to describe the overall picture of Chinese women's participation in sport, this research will pay more attention to women's sports participation at the grassroots. Second, in order to reveal the reality of women's status in sport and sports culture behind the glories of their success, this study will apply the critical perspectives of sport feminists and utilise the cultural conceptions of the female body. Finally, this exploration of the new era of Chinese women's participation in sport will be based on women's social roles and body experiences in the transformation of Chinese society. These three key points are crucial in designing the research methods and analysing the data.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided feminist perspectives for the theoretical framework in respect of sport and the body. Firstly, it has reviewed the theorisation of sport as a social phenomenon and cultural practice. First it examined general sociological views on sport. Then it compared five social theories that contribute to identify the specific issues, interpret the findings and uncover the deeper meanings underpinning the phenomena of sport. Although different theories have a variety of focuses on sport, they can provide the research with a unidimensional approach in order to understand Chinese sport in the complexity of social, economic, political and cultural contexts in the process of social transformation. Functionalist theory provides an explanation for the positive consequences associated with sports involvement in the life of individuals as well as the political purpose of state. Conflict theory assists us to focus on how and why sports participants are oppressed and exploited for economic purposes in the commercialisation of sport in China. Interactionist theory suggests the understanding of women's sport requires an understanding of the meanings, identities and interactions of women associated with their involvement in sport. According to this

theory, sport is connected to social relations and to cultures in complex and diverse ways. Critical theories can help explore gender power and social resources in the Chinese sports system. In conclusion, from focusing on the physical body, attention is given to social culture. The study of sport has evolved in step with society and has formed its own principles and perspectives.

Secondly, I reviewed liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, materialist feminism, Black feminism and postmodern feminism and their views on women's sport. Although each feminist framework has its merits in describing women's oppression and changes in society, I select the socialist feminist framework to lead my empirical research and my analysis of the findings. Socialist feminism consists of a unidimensional approach and is the clearest approximation to the complexities of sexism and socio-economics. Moreover, it serves to explain the economic, political and ideological background of the PRC. In summary, it is the most appropriate approach to uncover the reality of Chinese women's participation in sport and their concepts of the body.

Thirdly, I reviewed various theories of body. Sociology understands the body as a set of social practice; as a system of signs that are the carriers or bearers of social meaning and symbolism and as a system of signs which stand for and express relationships of power. For feminists, the body is the most essential battlefield in the struggle with the existing order of the world. Their debates on the body mainly stress that women's bodies are made but not born, and are intent on showing that the differences between the sexes are socially rather than biologically constructed. Furthermore, influenced by Foucault, some feminists highlight the fact that the female body is constructed through a variety of discourses of power, such as medical, scientific, technological, sexual and sporting discourses. Sport feminists believe that we should re-conceptualise the female body through sport as an important experience of embodiment. However, they argue that a woman's sporting body is constrained by her social roles and consider that rebuilding women's bodies is essential to re-building women's status in society. However, they still worry that the female sporting body can be seen as an attempt to conform to stereotypical images of femininity. Western feminist perspectives on the female sporting body and Chinese studies within the

same field and with a historical perspective inform the research and constitute a part of theoretical base, assisting the development of the research aims and objectives.

Chapter Two and Chapter Three mapped and assessed the relevant literatures, including specific theories developed in the West and local studies carried out in China. They constitute the theoretical framework of the research and inform the study, constructing aims, objectives, questions and approaches. In the next chapter, I shall demonstrate the methodology that links the theoretical position to empirical exploration.

Chapter Four

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Methodology represents more than concern with research methods. Rather it reflects the theoretical and epistemological rationales for adopting the methods used in the given study (Denyer, 2002). The aim of this chapter is to link the theoretical and epistemological positions adopted to the research methods and examine the methods used for gathering the empirical materials. The tasks of this chapter are: to address the key epistemological assumption that backs up the selection of a qualitative research paradigm; to state the specific research process and methods adopted for gathering the empirical materials and analysing data; to explain the research validity and reliability and to discuss the ethical issues and problems encountered in the research.

Before I discuss my methodology, I would like to simply discuss my role within the research. I am twenty-six years old. I grew up in China and gained my first degree in sociology at Fudan University, one of the best universities in China. During my study at Fudan University I became interested in women's issues, especially Chinese women's changing situations in urban society since the 1980s. When I came to the UK, I intended to develop this study into my PhD study with a sports perspective. Why did I choose sport? I was born in a sports family and have a strong interest in exploring sports phenomena. My mother works in the Chinese Sports Ministry and my father is a professor at Beijing Sport University where most of the Chinese Olympic champions are produced. I am also a sports participant. I like swimming, jogging and playing table tennis. From my own sports experience, I am aware of that Chinese women's sport has changed in urban cities in the post-Mao era. Therefore, I intend to conduct a research on the relationship between the changes in Chinese cities and in Chinese women's own desires, ambitions and expectations in society and in sport during the transformation era. However, in this research I am a researcher. My

experience will help me to design questions and to approach interviewees but I will not allow my own feelings and experience to over-cloud my judgment.

4.2 The Selection of Research Paradigm

The framework for the research was designed around critical and cultural perspectives on gender power in the sport system in the process of urbanisation. Central to this was the analysis of discourses that influenced the creation of gender power relations. Discourse might be expressed through the written word, speech, pictorial representation and body language. It was therefore necessary to select a research paradigm by which each of these could be analysed (Shaw, 2000). In order to choose a proper paradigm, the first priority should be to clarify the epistemological position adopted by the research.

4.2.1 Epistemological Assumptions

A paradigm is 'a world view, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world' (Patton, 1978: 203). All research (whether quantitative or qualitative) is based on some underlying assumptions about what constitutes 'valid' research and which research methods are appropriate. As Mason (2002) has pointed out, at the beginning of research it is very important to know where the researcher stands on the significant questions about what empirical research can do, and what we can know on the basis of it. In order to conduct and evaluate the research, 'Urbanisation and the Transformation of Women's Participation in Sport', it is therefore important to know what the assumptions are and how these assumptions apply to the research. This section will compare three main epistemological assumptions: positivist, interpretive and critical realist (Chua, 1986). The aim is to provide a rationale for adopting the critical realist position in this research.

Positivists generally assume that 'reality is objectively given and can be described by measurable properties, which are independent of the observer (researcher) and his or her instruments' (Partington et al., 1999: 4). Thus, positivist studies generally attempt

to test theory, in an attempt to increase the predictive understanding of phenomena (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). However, positivists would not accept that phenomena could be influenced by deeper structures which may not be directly observable, or at best inferred from direct indications. In contrast, interpretive researchers start out with the assumption that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings (Boland, 1985). According to the interpretive perspective, the world is socially constructed; therefore, interpretive studies require an understanding of the discourse of actors within context. Interpretive methods of research aim at 'producing an understanding of the context of the information system, and the process whereby the information system influences and is influenced by the context' (Walsham 1993: 4–5). However, interpretive research does not predefine dependent and independent variables, but focuses on the full complexity of human reasoning as the situation emerges (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994).

This doctoral study not only intends to comprehensively describe the changes in women's participation in sport, but also aims to gain a profound understanding of how Chinese women experience their bodies and challenge their traditional image through sport in the context of social, political and cultural transformations. Positivist research could not allow this study to dig deep beneath the surface. Interpretivism allows an understanding of the social construction of phenomena and discourse which could affect women's participation in sport. However interpretivism rejects formulating substantive hypotheses before actually beginning the research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

As noted above, neither the positivist nor interpretivist assumptions can provide an adequate conceptualisation of reality. Bhasker (1975) developed a multi-level ontology, which argued that reality exists in three overlapping domains: the empirical, the actual and the real. According to Bhasker (1975), the empirical domain is about experience or observed events. The actual domain indicates events whether observed or not. The real domain implies the underlying tendency or mechanisms that may in a given situation rise to events or may lie dormant, being cancelled out by other forces. Based on this multi-level ontology, critical researchers assume that social reality is historically constituted and that it is produced and reproduced by people. Although

people can consciously act to change their social and economic circumstances, critical researchers recognise that their ability to do so is constrained by various forms of social, cultural and political domination. Thus, what one takes to be significant and how one collects data are all reflections of the theory and of the research approach (Denyer, 2002). According to this argument, the literature review would inform and develop the research. The theoretical framework of this study was constituted by urbanisation theory, sport theory, feminist theory and body theory. Those were outlined as the theoretical background and used to construct the primary research aims and objectives. In addition, the existing theories at the data analysis stage have helped to interpret the complexities of the social situation in the process of urbanisation in China. Critical research focuses on the oppositions, conflicts and contradictions in contemporary society. These features help explore the causes of alienation and domination in sport, which provide the study with a perspective into women's real role in sport and other situations in contemporary Chinese society. Consequently, compared to positivism and interpretivism, critical realism provides the study with the most appropriate epistemological assumptions.

4.2.2 Consideration of Qualitative Research Paradigm

If there is one thing that distinguishes humans from the natural world, it is our ability to talk (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994)! Qualitative research is about the word rather than the number. It emphasises 'the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants' (Bryman, 2001: 264). In this section, based on these epistemological assumptions, I shall examine the motivation for this study's employment of qualitative research.

Above all, the use of qualitative research effectively reflects the fact that social properties are the outcome of the interactions between individuals rather than phenomena 'out there' and separated from those involved in its construction. Urbanisation, Chinese women's status and the Chinese sports system as three individually social 'properties' are not independent of each other. In turn, they have direct relationships, interacting and influencing each other. The use of qualitative research helps make sense of the internal relationship of these three social properties.

Second, the qualitative paradigm welcomes the articulation of discourse through deep and detailed data that mirror individual subjectivity (Cottle, 1982). The construction of this principle allows Chinese women's own voices to be heard within the context of the research as they participate in sport and re-build their bodies within the political, economic, social and cultural contexts.

Third, qualitative research is a site of multiple methodologies and research practices (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). As a site for discussion or discourse, qualitative research is used in many separate disciplines. It could use semiotics, narrative, content, discourse, archival and phonemic analysis, even statistics (Nelson et al., 1992). The research aims to explore the relationship of urbanisation, women and sport. It is therefore necessary to select a research paradigm by which each of these can be analysed. Given that the research is a cross-field study, multiple methods are required to assist such research to gather data in depth.

In summery, applying the qualitative paradigm to this research has allowed women's voices to be heard and it seems to be the most appropriate method of achieving the study's objectives.

4.3 The Research Process

To link the epistemological position with the research approach, the process of study was divided into several stages:

Stage 1: Reviewing existing theories

According to critical realists, how one collects data is a reflection of the theory applied to the research approach. In order to inform the study and help construct the research questions, relevant literature was initially mapped and assessed. In this thesis, the theoretical framework drew on urbanisation theory, feminist theory, sport theory and body theory. The literature reviews were not only based on existing theories but also examined some local studies. The main findings from the reviews have been addressed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

Stage 2: Developing research aims and questions

The research aims and objectives were developed through the theoretical review and also amended by practical considerations as identified through the literature review and the research procedures. They led the data collection approaches as well as the analytical issues. Informed by the existing theories and previous studies, the research aimed to explore: how Chinese urbanisation, the Chinese sport system and the Chinese gender system have interacted with each other and impacted on women's participation in sport; in what ways Chinese women have reconstructed their bodies and social status through participation in sport in the process of urbanisation; whether Chinese women have achieved emancipation partially by freeing their bodies and changing their traditional image in the new era. In order to achieve these aims, a series of questions have been asked: first, what were the main contributions of urbanisation to social development and to women's participation in sport? Second, what were the gender relationships during urbanisation in China and how did they affect women's role in the sport system and sport culture? Third, how did the changes in body culture of Chinese cities impact upon women's self-realisation and emancipation in sport and society? These were the basic questions that the study intended to explore. Further embedded questions were explored in the interview question guide (see Appendix C).

Stage 3: Collecting data

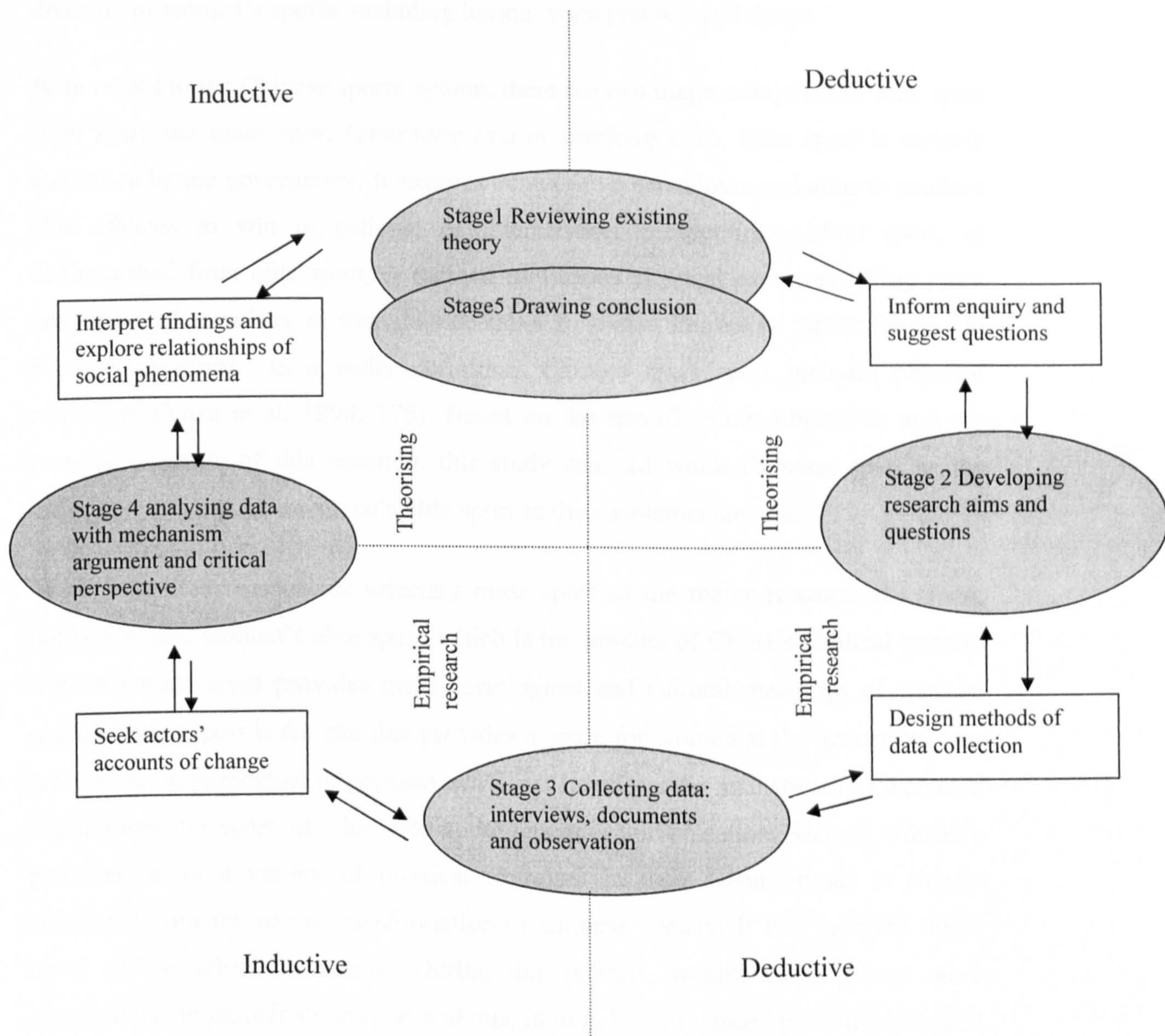
In order to put the proposed aims and questions into practice, a strategic choice needed to be made about which methods and sources were most appropriate for answering the research questions. The research in relation to feminist theory needed women's own discourse to be demonstrated. In-depth interviews could not only provide interviewees' life histories and reflect the relationship of urbanisation, women and sport, but also could reveal women's own views on sports participation and their concepts of the female body. Given the complexity of this study, besides interviews, the research approach includes the examination of relevant documentation and visual data. These documentary and visual sources have helped to provide the research with a strong sense of context, which facilitates an understanding of the phenomena. The specific benefits of interview, document and visual methods and how they were used in this study will be described in Section 4.5.

Stage 4: Analysing data

It became clear that decisions about which methods to use involved anticipating the process of data analysis (Mason, 2002). Data could not express themselves. It was therefore very important to make assumptions about the analytical process through which data could be used to assemble arguments and explanations. Grounded theory was employed as a way of thinking about and conceptualising data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). It provides a method of analysing the data gathered from interview, document and visual data. In addition to identifying key concepts, it allows propositions to emerge from the data and these could be subjected to further analysis (Denyer, 2002). Besides, according to grounded theory, existing theory can help to interpret the findings. There were two specific steps in analysing data: data management and data interpretation. Mechanism argument was used for exploring the interrelationship of the sport system and the gender system in the context of urbanisation. Critical perspectives were used to uncover the reality of how Chinese women experience their bodies through sport and to challenge the traditional image.

Stage 5: Drawing a conclusion

At the end of the research, a systematic conclusion was drawn from the mechanism argument about the relationship of Chinese urbanisation, women and sport. It also concluded the critical analyses and answered the question as to whether Chinese women have changed or maintained their social status in relation to sport. Additionally, the emerging conclusions, which were based on the analysis of empirical data gathered from interviews, documents and observation may also evaluate the generalisation of existing theories and studies relevant to Chinese women's sport.

Figure 4.1 The Strategy of Research Stages

4.4 The Selection of Research Sites and Locations

The selection criteria for the research sites were associated with the target of the study. How to define women's participation in sport was the key to deciding how to select the research sites. In previous sports publications, an activity was defined as sport if it involved two or more competitors, a goal of winning, clear criteria for determining the winner, and if victory was determined mainly by the relative physical ability of the competitors (Christensen et al. 2001: viii). However, in terms of women's sport,

Christensen et al. (2001) suggest we should use a broader definition to reflect the diversity of women's sports, including hiking, yoga practice and dance.

With regard to the Chinese sports system, there are two major components: elite sport (*jinji tiyu*) and mass sport (*qunzhong tiyu* or *dazhong tiyu*). Elite sport is entirely controlled by the government. It requires competitive behaviours and aims to produce elite athletes to win in national or international competitions. Mass sport, as distinguished from elite sport, is defined as various physical exercises taking place among social members in their leisure time. It is also known as 'sport for all' in Western countries.¹ In a wider definition, Chinese mass sport includes physical education² (Yuan et al, 1998: 125). Based on the specific aims, objectives and my personal interests of this research, this study selected women's mass sport as the major research site, and women's elite sport as the supplementary site.

There were five reasons for selecting mass sport as the major research site. First, unlike Chinese women's elite sport, which is the product of China's political system, women's mass sport provides more sociological and cultural meanings of sport to women. Mass sport is the site that provides a space for women at the grassroots who are anxious to participate in physical activities. It reflects the mainstream of women's requirements for sport, as a lifestyle in the process of urbanisation. Second, women's participation in a variety of physical exercises in their leisure times is closely associated with the social transformation of Chinese society. It has been the direct result of the urban movement. During this process, women have gained more opportunities to participate in sport and this, in turn, has influenced their lifestyles and perspective on their bodies. Third, women's mass sport is a new phenomenon since the 1980s. It can comprehensively reflect Chinese women's complex changes in urbanisation through their behaviour and attitudes towards sport. Fourth, previous studies of Chinese women's sport have focused more on elite sport; the mass sport has been largely disregarded. This research thesis examining mass sport in China is intended to redress this perceived lack of research in this field. Fifth, I am a mass

¹ In Chinese context, the term 'mass sport' is more frequently used than 'Sport for All' with comparison to 'competitive sport' (elite sport) in the official occasions.

² Chinese physical education (*tiyu jiaoyu*) is a central part of the school curriculum, which is issued by the Chinese educational system and supported by the sports administrative department. It aims at building up boys' and girls' fitness, teaching them sports skills, influencing their sports value and creating their identity and sense of self so that they can participate successfully in social roles and relationships (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 1979).

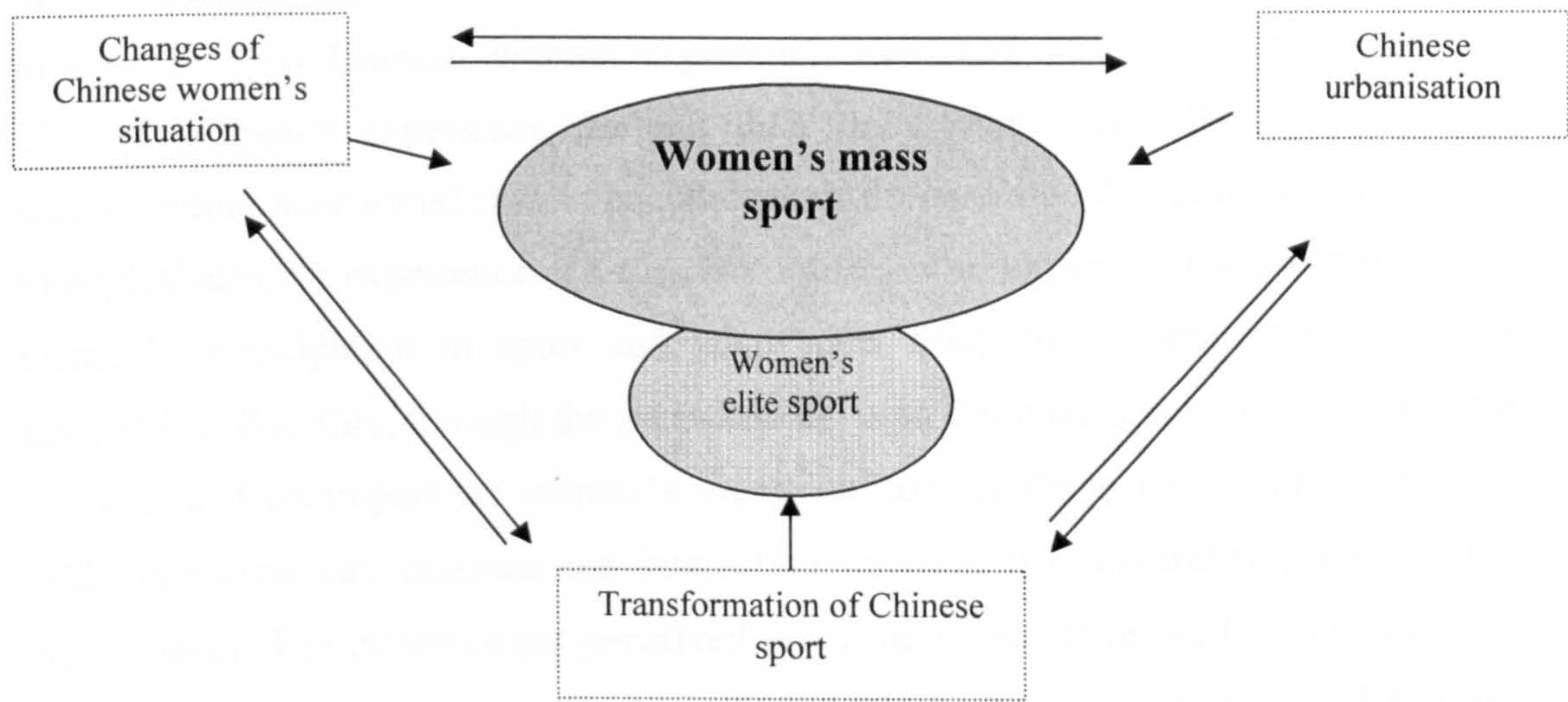
sports participant. Therefore I am more interested in women's sports exercises at the grassroots.

Apart from mass sport, this study also looks at women's elite sport as a complementary research site. The exploration of women's elite sport involved finding out how and why those Chinese elite female athletes were produced and revealing the social conditions that have encouraged Chinese women to participate in elite sport and to achieve international reputations on the world stage. The examination of Chinese women's elite sport can help in clarifying the changes in women's sports policy and the alternative ideas in women's sport since the 1980s. It can also assist in the understanding of the cultural interaction between elite and mass sport.

Associated with the purpose of the study, the selection criteria for research sites also took three key social backgrounds into account. They were Chinese urbanisation, the transformation of the Chinese sport system and changes in Chinese women's status. Conducting the research in operational sites built on the internal relationship and the interaction among these three social phenomena, which constitute the integral background of women's sport in contemporary China.

As for the research locations, I selected two cities. One was Beijing, the capital city, to represent the big cities in the north. Another was Mianyang, which represents the medium-sized cities of the south. Beijing is not only the political, economic and cultural centre of China, but also a cosmopolitan city in the world. It possesses a large variety of social resources and is a typical developed area in the north. Mianyang, located in southwest China, is a newly developing city. It is a typical of the Chinese medium-sized cities that have risen since economic reform. Selecting these two cities, on the one hand, can show the different levels of Chinese cities in terms of facilities and resources and their impacts on women's participation in sport; on the other hand, to a certain extent the choice can mirror the different lifestyles and values of women's participation in sport between the north and the south in China. Another reason I chose these two cities was that I had lived in Mianyang and Beijing for many years: they were therefore familiar to me and I had developed useful research contacts. This experience could contribute to facilitating access to data.

Figure 4.2 The Research Sites



4.5 Data Collection

As indicated above, the qualitative paradigm allowed the use and integration of multiple research methods. There are many possible methods of data collection in qualitative research, including participant observation, surveys, interviews and documentary research (Blaxter et al., 2001). This study chiefly employed interviews to collect data. In addition, documentary and visual data were also important sources to supplement the interviews.

4.5.1 Interview

Bryman (2001) suggests that the interview is probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research. Interviews have several key advantages: these include the discovery of hidden forms of behaviour, the exploration of mechanisms linking phenomena and the explanation of variation (Edward et al., 1994). Further, Kitay and Callus (1998) observe that the great strength of the interview is not simply that it is a way to gather information, but it allows the researcher to place the information in a

wider context. In this section, I shall state why I choose qualitative interview and how I conduct the proposed interviews.

Why is the interview the most relevant approach to use in this study? Firstly, it helps to describe how Chinese women experience sport and what roles sport plays in Chinese women's experience through their daily lives. Secondly, it assisted in understanding how social factors encourages or limits women's participation in sport through their own experience. Thirdly, it contributed to exploring the real purpose of women's participation in sport and what sport bring to women from their own perspective. Fourthly, through the interviewees' own discourses, it reflects the cultural conflicts and its impact on women's views on how to shape their sporting bodies. Fifth, interview can enhance the interaction between the researcher (me) and the interviewees. The interviewees perceived me as an exerciser as well as a researcher. Through the communication, they were willing to share their experience and feelings of sport with me.

In general, there are two main types of qualitative interview: they are unstructured and semi-structured interviews. In unstructured interviewing, researchers may just pose a single question to which the interviewees are encouraged to respond freely. This tends to be very similar in character to a conversation (Burgess 1984; Bryman 2001). This study has a specific and clear purpose; consequently the unstructured interview was considered too discursive for concentrating clearly on this focus. In order that the topic questions could be asked step by step and a clear focus maintained throughout the interview, the semi-structured interview was employed. Considering that different research sites had a particular research focus, this study involved different degrees of structure and the interviews also allowed room to explore topics of particular interest to interviewees. Prior to the interview process, an interview schedule (see Table 4.1) and an interview questions guide was prepared to facilitate the questioning process (see Appendix C).

Table 4.1 Interview Schedule

	Mass Sport		Elite Sport	
The First Field Work	03/07/03	Interview Ma Li, Director of Sports Department in Chongwen District in Beijing.	07/07/03	Interview Professor Dong Jinxia (an expert in Chinese women's elite sport) at Beijing Sport University in Beijing.
	06/07/03	Interview Lin Xianpeng, Director of Mass Sport Department of the CGAS, Beijing.		
	07/07/03	Interview Professor Sun Baoli (an expert in women's sports studies) at Beijing Sport university.	11/07/03	Interview Huashao Lin, a former parachutist in the 1960s in her home in Beijing.
	09/07/03	Interview Zhang Lin, the Manager of Beijing CSI-Bally Total Fitness Club Co., Ltd.		
	15/07/03-21/07/03	Interview 6 female sports participants in Longtan Park and Tiantan Park (Morning or Evening) in Beijing.	13/07/03	Interview National Female Weightlifting Team members in their accommodation in Beijing.
	24/0703-30/07/03	Interview 5 female sports participants in Huawei Community (Neighbourhood) in Beijing.		
	03/08/03-09/08/03	Interview 6 female participants in Beijing CSI-Bally Total Fitness Club Co., Ltd.		
The Second Field Work	21/07/04	Interview Zhao Xiaoyong, the director of Sports Department in Fucheng Community in Mianyang.	22/07/04	Interview Zhang Pingfang, a former table tennis player in Mianyang Sports School.
	25/07/04	Interview Zhang Jun, the Aerobic Coach in <i>Xinlida</i> Fitness Club in Mianyang.		
	02/08/04-06/08/04	Interview 4 female sports participants in the People's Park in Mianyang.		
	08/08/04-14/08/04	Interview 5 female sports participants in Fucheng Community in Mianyang.		
	16/08/04-20/08/04	Interview 4 female participants in <i>Xinlida</i> Fitness Club in Mianyang.		

Mass Sports

As mentioned above, the major research site was mass sport. The chief research strategy was to explore how urbanisation has influenced women's emancipation through their participation in sport. The interview topics were concerned with women's real purpose and motivation in participating in exercise; the social factors that supported or limited them in participating in those activities; and the satisfactions they achieved physically, psychologically and socially from those activities.

Due to the fact that Chinese mass sport includes various forms within different levels of physical activity, the specific interview sites were carefully selected. The main spaces which encouraged women's physical activities in Chinese cities were centralised on gyms or fitness clubs, parks or squares and playgrounds in neighbourhoods. The women who took part in sport in different places had different backgrounds in terms of their income, occupations, education and domestic situation. Generally speaking, women who had the economic capability to join sport clubs were from the middle class. The sports participants in parks or voluntary community organisations comprised more working-class women and unemployed women because of low price and easy access. As for the women who individually exercised on neighbourhood playgrounds, they were mainly the irregular exercisers from the working class. In different interview sites, there were specific criteria for sampling, for asking particularly focused questions, and for different access to interviewees.

Before interviewing the sports participants in each site, I interviewed sports managers, coaches and scholars, who not only provided me with an overall picture of women's sports participation, but also gave me suggestions about where to conduct my research. My parents both worked in the China General Administration of Sport³ (CGAS thereafter), so I had access to major research groups. They were willing to allow my interviews and assisted in introducing me to the sites to conduct my research. Before I interviewed the participants, I sent formal letters (see a sample of letter attached in the Appendix A) and made appointments.

³ In 1998, along with the reform of the sports administrative system, the Sports Ministry (National Sports Commission) was renamed the China General Administration of Sport.

I employed random sampling and selected female participants in each site by observing their appearance and performance. The selection of the interviewees also took age and marital situation into account. In total, I carried out thirty 'formal interviews' among mass sports participants, which were transcribed for later analysis (see the transcriptions in Appendix D). I interviewed 10 female club participants; 10 female exercisers in parks; and 10 female exercisers in neighbourhoods. The interviews were conducted when participants finished their exercises, or appointments were made for more convenient times. The interviews normally took about one hour. In addition, I had numerous 'informal' conversations with individuals, which I documented in a field diary. These more casual interviews took place mainly when the sports participants had a break.

Before starting the interview topics, some general questions were asked such as respondents' age, career, marital status and whether they had children. According to the principles of the 'semi-structured interview', the interviews were conducted using themes or topics as a guide. As Patton (1978) suggests, the interview guide provides topics or subject areas within which the interview is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that elucidate and illuminate the particular subject in which researcher is interested. Following the interview guide allowed freedom to build a conversation within a particular subject area, and made it possible to establish a good interactive relationship between the interviewee and interviewer. When I conducted the interview, I adjusted the order of interview questions slightly according to the informants' responses, and engaged in light conversation with them occasionally to put them at ease. Access to gyms and voluntary organisations was obtained through Mass Sport Management Department (*qun zhong ti yu guan li si*) (MSMD) in the CGAS. The staff there were willing to provide me with information and to introduce me to gym managers and coaches. I gained cooperation from them. As for the parks and playgrounds, they were open areas for everyone. Before the formal interview, each participant was given an Informed Consent Form (see the form of attached both in English and Chinese in Appendix B). The form explained the purpose and methods of the research and asked for their cooperation. The interviewees were given anonymity. After they decided they were willing to accept it, the interviews were carried out. In addition, summaries of the eventual research results were promised to participants. The interviews in Beijing were carried out by using Mandarin (Standard

Chinese). In Mianyang, the local language (the Sichuan dialect) was used for the interviews. Using the local language that the interviewees were familiar with effectively eased the distance between them and the interviewer and promoted a relaxed response.

Elite Sport

As indicated, women's elite sport is an important part of Chinese sport. Chinese female athletes were the pioneers who first empowered Chinese women through their ability to challenge their bodies and win Chinese women great honours in the world. Although they were not the focus of this study, a few interviews with female athletes assisted the study with comprehensive comparisons. Flick (2002) has pointed out that an alternative to approaching individual worlds of experience through the openness that can be achieved in semi-structured interviews is to use narratives produced by interviewees as a form of data. In order to approach the female athletes' experiential world in a more comprehensive way, life stories were encouraged to be narrated, led by such questions as 'Why did you choose sport as your career? How did you challenge your body and train to be an elite athlete? How did you realise your own ability in sport and image in society?'

Understanding these key questions helped us to understand how elite women were produced in the context of political, economic and cultural changes in China. I interviewed Hua Shaolin, who was a female parachutist in the 1960s. She broke the world record three times and from her story a picture of the elite sports system associated with the women's emancipation movement in the Maoist era was painted. Interviews were also conducted with the National Female Weightlifting Team in Beijing. They represented the new generation of women's elite sport in the reform era. I also interviewed a retired table tennis player in Mianyang, who was currently studying at Sichuan University. The interviews reflected the changes in women's sport in different historical periods.

Accessibility to these elite female athletes was an important factor. My parents worked in the CGAS, and this provided me with access to athletes. For the athletes who were in the national teams, contact was made through the National Athletes

Training Centre (*guo jia xun lian zhong xin*), led by a letter of inquiry written in Chinese (See the letter attached in Appendix A). For the athletes who had already left the national teams, contact was made through personal '*guanxi*'. '*Guanxi*' can be translated into English in a variety of different ways, including social relationships, social connections, personal relationships and personal ties. '*Guanxi*' is very important in Chinese society. Each interviewee was given an Informed Consent Form with the explanation of the purposes and methods of the research. I got permission to use their real names in my thesis and promised to give them the research results.

4.5.2 Documentary Data

In addition to interviews, secondary data also provided an important source of information in the research. Documentary evidence used in this research comprised three groups. The first established the general histories of Chinese urbanisation, the transformation of the Chinese sport system and the changes in Chinese women's situation, which provided the historical background to the research. The second took the form of documents and included specific policies, such as the urban development plan, the 'sport for all' plan, gender equality policies and development plans. These indicated the social needs of contemporary Chinese society and provided a political background to the research. The third form of documentation was publications. These comprised official data, academic articles and conference papers from which the interview questions were developed – for example, the type and contents of sport activities which interviewees were doing, how much time they had spent, the age and class structure of sport participants. In summary, the documentary data collection was not only a necessary complement to the interview method but also an important source of data which supplemented the research.

Documentary data were mainly obtained from three institutions: First, the CGAS and its affiliated research institutions such as the Sport Social Science Association and the Chinese Society for the History of PE and Sport (CSHPES). Second, the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) and its Research Institute on Women's Issues. Third, the Institution of Sociology of the Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS) and China Population Information Centre (CPIC) in the CASS.

In addition, information was also sought from relevant libraries, such as the National Library of China in Beijing, the Academy of Social Science Library in Beijing, the Library of Beijing Sport University. These sites provided specific information on the process of Chinese urbanisation, Chinese women's movement, sports history and sports reform in China.

Information was also obtained from local newspapers, magazines and the Internet, such as *People's Daily* (*ren ming ri bao*), *Xinhua News* (*Xinhua xiaoxi*), *Sports Daily* (*zhong guo ti yu bao*), *New Sport* (*Xin tiyu*), *Fitness and Beauty* (*jian yu mei*), *Healthy Life* (*jian kang shen huo*), *Chinese Women* (*Zhongguo Funv*) *Good Wife* (*Hao zhufu*), the official websites of the Chinese Sport (www.sport.gov.cn) and popular websites of the Chinese life (www.sina.com.cn) and (www.china.org.cn). The mass media provided some indications of the issues that were important to the interviewees. Information from the mass media was also examined as a supplementary research source, reflecting society's dominant discourses on women's images and women's sport.

4.5.3 Visual Data

Besides documentary evidence, visual data were helpful in recording and illuminating the public dimensions of social life. Emmison and Smith (2000) point out social life is visual in diverse and counterintuitive ways. They define 'visual data' as not only photographs, advertisements and television programmes, but also material objects, buildings, clothing, body language and uses of space. Thus, visual inquiry is 'the study of the seen and observable' (Emmison and Smith, 2000: ix).

Visual data contributed to the research in two ways. First, as mentioned above, the interviews were based on random sampling, being selected by observing participants' appearance, behaviours and performance. The interview might well involve systematic visual observation of aspects of the interviewees' dress, demeanour and non-verbal behaviour, use of equipment, spatial context and so on (Mason, 2002). The second contribution of visual data to the research lays down that 'lived visual data' (Emmison and Smith, 2000: 153) can also be used to analyse places and settings such as public and private spaces, through which urbanisation facilitates women's sport.

One can also examine gender roles and ideologies by decoding the images of women in publications. In short, visual evidence from the media, publications or from the direct observation of the uses made of athletic fields, gyms, and public activities area were important data supplementary to what was obtained from interviews and documents (see photos and pictures collected in Appendix E).

4.6 Data Analysis

The key question for this section involves how to construct and present a convincing explanation or argument on the basis of the collected data. Lacey and Luff (2001) suggest qualitative data analysis is a process that tries to make sense of the mass of words generated by interviews or observational data which have to be described and summarised. The question might require researchers to seek relationships between various themes that have been identified, or relate behaviour or ideas to the characteristics of respondents. Instead of using computer programmes such as NVivo, more traditional ways to refine themes in the data were adopted in this study. This was because, although the computer programme might aid the researcher in the development of multiple categories and enable the pursuit of alternative analytical themes, it lacked the capacity to think, reflect and analyse (Lacey and Luff, 2001) and to make social sense of, and judgements on, the data.

In Mason's opinion (2002), one's approach to analysis of all kinds – including sorting data and building explanations – should be both strategic and internally consistent. In order to facilitate the expression of Chinese women's discourse on participation in sport, it was necessary to make sense of, and organise, the data into a presentable form. There are many particular theoretical approaches to qualitative analysis. Considering the overall aims of the analysis and what I wanted the data to contribute to, for example generating a new conceptual or theoretical understanding of urbanisation and its impact on Chinese women's sport and the image of female bodies in Chinese society, I applied the grounded theory approach to the analysis.

4.6.1 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a way of thinking about and conceptualising data. It evolved out of research by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967). Glaser and Strauss were concerned to outline an inductive method of qualitative research, which would allow social theory to be generated systematically from data. That is, theories would be ‘grounded’ in rigorous empirical research, rather than produced in the abstract. It was important to emphasise that what has distinguished grounded theory from many other approaches to qualitative analysis has been this emphasis on theory as the final output of research (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory is a method that has been used extensively across a variety of social science disciplines. It requires that theory emerges from the data, but does not see these as separate. Data collection, analysis and theory formulation are regarded as reciprocally related, and the approach incorporates explicit procedures to guide this. Whereas other forms of qualitative analysis may legitimately stop at the levels of description or simple interpretation, the aim of grounded theory is theoretical development. A ‘grounded theory’ consists of ‘plausible relationships’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) among sets of concepts, which are directly developed from data analysis. Theory, in this sense, provides a set of testable propositions that help us to understand our social world more clearly, rather than being concerned about absolute ‘truths’. In terms of analysing qualitative data generated, at the heart of grounded theory is the idea of the constant comparative method. In this method, concepts or categories emerging from one stage of the data analysis are compared with concepts emerging from the next. According to this principle, researchers look for relationships between these concepts and categories by constantly comparing them, to form the basis of the emerging theory. During the following section, I shall describe the practical processes which are involved in actually carrying out the qualitative data analysis. Some methodologists view data analysis as consisting of two separate phases: data management and data interpretation. The following section will state how I managed the data in accordance to grounded theory.

4.6.2 Data Management

The first step of managing data was transcription. Field notes relevant to each interview were written up immediately after each interview, the purpose of which was to link the most recent interview with previous ones and to raise questions for the subsequent interview process (Strauss, 1987). The field notes were instrumental in allowing a continual interplay between data collection, analysis, reflections on guiding framework and evolving understanding (Tsai, 2003). The second step was to organise the data into the topic areas and manageable categories (Jones, 1985). I gave each interview a number and broke up field notes into sections identified by different places (forms) of women's physical activities. Participants' ages, occupations and marital status were taken into account. The interviewee was given a code number. A secure file was needed to link code numbers to the original interviewees, but with any research file, this was confidential. Narrative data were numbered using line or paragraph numbers, so that any unit of text could be traced back to its original context. The third step was familiarisation. In this process, I read and re-read the data, made memos and summarised before the formal analysis began. After familiarisation with the material, I engaged in the fourth step, coding to develop defined categories. Coding was the means by which data were clustered into smaller, more meaningful units where common themes and discrepancies could be identified. It sharpened the focus of the data and helped with theoretical sampling (Bryman, 2001). Initially, there were very basic, perhaps key words used by the respondents, names that I gave to themes in the data. This was the step which enabled me to generate an index of terms that helped to interpret and theorise ideas in relation to the data. Then I considered more general theoretical ideas in relation to codes and data. I tried to outline connections between concepts and categories I had developed, to consider in more detail how they related to the existing literature and to develop hypotheses about the linkages I had made and then return to the data to see if they could be confirmed.

4.6.3 Data Interpretation

The paragraph above stated how I managed the data; now I shall discuss the principles by which the data were interpreted. The data interpretation 'involved explaining the

finding, answering why questions, attaching significance to particular results, and putting patterns into an analytic framework' (Patton, 1990: 375). Interpretation of research findings was based on the description of data, but went beyond the descriptive data. According to Patton (1990) 'interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, building linkages, and dealing with rival explanations and disconfirming cases as part of testing the validity of an interpretation' (Patton, 1990: 423).

Understanding Chinese women's emancipation through their participation in sport in the process of Chinese urbanisation needed 'mechanical' arguments that focused on how social phenomena and process operated or were constituted. This was because the investigation was researched in a complex context. As Mason (2002) points out, mechanical arguments should not be confused with causal ones because, although they usually involve an attempt to explain how and sometimes why social phenomena work, often in relation to other phenomena, they are rarely based on the idea of a cause-effect relationship between variables. Chinese women's participation in sport in the context of economic, political and cultural transformation was a very complicated social phenomenon. It referred to at least three fields: urbanisation, the sport system and the social situation of women. The functions and interaction of these three social institutions, which have deeply influenced Chinese women's sport, could not be completely understood without the use of mechanical arguments. The mechanism of these three research fields and their interactions, which influence women's participation in sport, are discussed in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven. Chapter Six explores how urbanisation stimulated the reform of the sports system and created new dimensions in Chinese women's sports participation. Chapter Seven discusses the changes in Chinese women's social status in urbanisation and their inspiration and restriction on women's sports participation.

The analysis does not stop at the stage of demonstrating the social mechanisms that have led to Chinese women's participation in sport. It goes further and aims to explore how Chinese women's bodies are involved in a number of social and cultural practices. In order to understand those questions, cultural analysis and critical thinking are the way to argue. Cultural analysis is concerned with understanding the nature of social experience and the meanings people invest in and create out of this experience.

Mapping out the meanings of cultural texts and practices that appear as natural or inevitable is a complex and politically charged task. And it is the struggle over representations of reality and the promotion of particular ways of seeing the world (Howley, 2002). Thus language, discourse and the mass media are taken into account prominently in this study. Critical thinking in the analysis is needed to respond to material by distinguishing facts and opinions or personal feelings. It provides the analysis with ideas on how to construct and recognise the structure of arguments and adequately support arguments; how to evaluate information, materials and data by drawing inferences and drawing reasonable conclusions; how to apply understandings and knowledge to new problems; and how to develop rational and reasonable interpretations, suspending beliefs and remaining open to new information, methods, cultural systems and values (Maiorana, 1992). In addition, the critical thinking is proper way to interpret phenomena in social transformations. The use of critical thinking is a pathway to help the analysis uncover bias and prejudice and to make assertions based on sound logic and solid evidence. With cultural analysis and critical thinking, in Chapters Five and Chapter Seven, the female body in the urban culture and the sports system is discussed in terms of the operational site and the generation of modern forms of political and social power.

4.7 Validity and Reliability

Generally speaking, validity and reliability are important criteria in establishing and assessing the quality of research for the quantitative researcher. In qualitative research, the question of how to demonstrate that the evidence is meaningful, the arguments are convincing and the research is of good quality is a particularly fraught one. Mason (1996) argues that in qualitative research, validity and reliability 'are different kinds of measures of the quality, rigour and wider potential of research, which are achieved according to certain methodological and disciplinary conventions and principles' (Mason, 1996: 21).

Validity refers to whether researchers have been 'observing, identifying, or "measuring" what they say they were' (Mason, 2002: 39). Researchers therefore need to work out how well a particular method and data source might be illuminating their

concepts. The use of semi-structured interviews with their list of proposed questions guarantees that the research has a clear aim. The selection of research sites can compromise the explicit purpose of the research targets. In effect, primary data from interviews can provide one or more descriptions of what actually has happened in Chinese women's participation in sport and their experiences in reshaping their bodies in the process of urbanisation. Documentary and visual data complement the information from the interviews. In addition, application of grounded theory can help with the systematic analysis of data and with the operational validity illuminating the concepts of the study. Since this research is related to China, translation skills are very important to guarantee its validity. There are two translation skills. One is translating a sentence word by word; the other is 'translating by meanings'. I preferred to use the skill that translates the meaning of interviewees' discourses and documentary data. Chinese and English are different language systems. They are different in sentence construction and ways of expression. Thus, word-by-word translations cannot help us understand the real meanings articulated in the interviews and documents. Instead, translating the general meaning of the data can enhance methodological validity. The purpose of the interviews was to illuminate Chinese women's concepts of sport and their bodies in an interpretative and reflexive manner, not just literally. In addition, the research was also interested in the ways in which the participants and the documents articulated their ideas, not just in the substance of what they said. In consequence, it was necessary to choose a valid way of translating the data by meanings but not by words.

'Reliability involves the accuracy of research methods and techniques' (Mason, 2002: 39). This is taken to imply the extent to which a measurement can produce the same results, however and whenever it is used (Kirk and Miller, 1986). Research in the quantitative tradition often relies on the standardisation of research instruments, and on crosschecking the data yielded by such instruments in order to check their reliability. However, in qualitative research, reliability of data can rarely be completely achieved, because the interaction between the researcher and the social environment cannot be fully controlled. In addition, though reliability of data may be regarded as indicated, there should also be awareness of the fact that all events are unique and non-replicable. Therefore the level of reliability in qualitative research depends on whether the methods used for obtaining the data are reasonable. At least,

the researchers must satisfy themselves and others that they have not invented or misrepresented the data. According to this principle, an appropriate way to obtain frank and open responses is required and the individual's perceptions of what happened must be made clear.

In terms of gaining frank and open responses, the researcher has been identified, and the confidentiality and anonymity of the research have been guaranteed, thus providing the interviewee with a free atmosphere in which to speak. As for enhancing the reliability of data, triangulation by data source as well as by method has been applied. For example, when I conducted research in fitness clubs, I interviewed club members, managers and coaches, and in this way cross-checked what really happened to female members in fitness gyms. Additionally, the use of multiple methods partially assisted with reliability through the gathering of data both from interviews and secondary sources. It meant validating information derived from interviews by checking accounts, documents and other visual evidence that provided the basis for evaluating interviewees' claims. The concept of triangulation – conceived as multiple methods – encouraged me to approach the research questions from different angles, and to explore my intellectual puzzles in a rounded and multi-faced way. It did enhance the reliability and validity (Mason, 2002). However, it has to be pointed out that triangulation cannot totally assess the efficiency or validity of the different methods and sources by comparing outcomes, because different methods and data sources are likely to provide different versions or levels of answers.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

'Discussions about the ethical issues of social research bring us into a realm in which the role of values in the research process becomes a topic concern' (Bryman, 2001: 476). This section is concerned with the ethical issues that arise from the developing relationships between researcher and research participants in the course of investigation.

The research was characterised by honesty and openness between researchers, participants and institutions. This intention was declared from the outset when the researcher introduced herself to the participants. In the interviews, it was openly

stated that the interviewer was a PhD researcher at a university in the UK, verified by an introductory letter on university-headed paper with the student ID. Before conducted these interviews, the research purpose was explained. Consent forms were given to the interviewees before they participated in this study, and the interviewees could also stop at any time if they did not want to complete the study. Furthermore, their participation in this study was not in response to other inducements.

In the interview, confidentiality was guaranteed. The interviewee knew that she or he was being interviewed and that the information she or he provided was to be used for research. The information that interviewees provided was treated with confidentiality and anonymity unless interviewees expressly agreed otherwise. The interviews were conducted face to face and individually in order to 'protect' others' knowledge of the results. I wrote down the notes rather than utilising videotape, because the interviewees felt uneasy when their voices were to be recorded. Only those engaged in the study could read the notes, unless informed consent had been gained. The notes would not be used for an additional purpose.

Given the variety of ways, in which visual methods and documents may be used, it was also necessary to pay attention to the ethical issues in collecting documentary and visual data. Mason (2002) suggests documents and visual data can take a very private or confidential form, and it could be difficult to establish informed consent for their use because they may refer to or implicate people other than their owners or keepers. Therefore, all the questions about ethical practice and informed consent applied equally to the use of documents and visual data. Generally, access to documents, especially official data, was relatively difficult. However, in the process of collecting documents, I used gatekeepers to whom I openly stated my identity and the purpose of the research. They were pleased to provide me with the information. This was because, on the one hand, I had personal '*guanxi*' with gatekeepers; on the other hand, the social scientific research was very much encouraged by Chinese academic departments and the government. Some of the data applied in the research has not been published; some data has been published. In the thesis, documentary and visual data were used carefully and the source was identified.

4.9 Conclusion

In summary, this thesis has adopted a qualitative research paradigm. Critical realist assumptions formulate the epistemological position of this research, which has resulted in the employment of the qualitative research approach. It has been argued that an individual's actions and discourse cannot be observed in an objective way and that the methods of natural sciences are not appropriate in this study. It has also been indicated that theory plays an important role in the research. It influences what is studied and how it is studied. In addition, theory plays an important role in helping the researcher to interpret complex human phenomena and, in particular, to understand hidden social mechanisms. The aims and objectives of the research are developed by the theoretical review and are also driven by the pragmatic demands of the research process. This has led to the formulation of the data collection approaches as well as to answering many of the analytical issues. Semi-structured interviews, documentary research and observation were considered the most appropriate methods to gain an understanding of internal relationship of urbanisation, women's status and sport system in China. They also contributed to revealing the economic, political, social and cultural meanings of female bodies to women's physical liberation, self-realisation and emancipation. The collected data were analysed based on grounded theory. Data management and data interpretation were two practical processes involved in actually carrying out qualitative analysis by mechanical argument and critical thinking. Validity and reliability are important criteria for establishing and assessing the research. They have been taken into account in the practical process of designing and conducting the study. Ethical issues have also been considered in relation to the research values of the research process.

Chapter Five

Historical Review: The Interrelationship of Urbanisation, the Image of Women's Body and Women's Sport in Maoist Era (1949 to 1979)

5.1 Introduction

The analysis of Chinese women's participation in sport in the period between 1949 and 1979 is identified as the key to understanding the continuity and changes of Chinese women's sport in the new era of urbanisation since 1980. This chapter aims to provide the study with a historical background by discussing how Chinese women's participation in sport was launched and developed in line with the fluctuating process of urbanisation in a capricious Chinese society between 1949 and 1979. It will also examine the interrelationship between urbanisation and the women's emancipation movement in sport during this period. Furthermore, it intends to build a fundamental argument by discovering whether the remarkable achievements of women's sport on the national and international stages between 1949 and 1979 have brought Chinese women true equality in Chinese society.

Chinese society, since the second decade of the twentieth century, has been the object of a revolution intended to change it in fundamental ways. The revolution aimed at nothing less than completely transforming every aspect of the semi-feudal and semi-colonial society (Zhu, 1991). Known as the 'sick man of Asia', China was a country dominated by foreign powers, unbridled corruption and mass starvation (Xu, 1985). Amidst the tremendous struggle and sacrifice of the civil war, on the 1st October 1949 the People's Republic of China (PRC) was born. Rebuilding the country and managing its transition to a socialist/communist society therefore became crucial tasks for the new state leaders (Fairbank and Macfarquhar, 1990; MacFarquhar and Fairbank, 1991).

To reconstruct a new country, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established a centralised political system, a planned economic system and a totalitarian cultural

system. This aimed at developing China into an ideal society with high economic levels of production and equitable levels of social development (Zhu, 1991). However, in the context of a poor economic base, a dramatically insecure political climate and immature social conditions, China suffered severely in the consequent fluctuating rise and fall of economic, political and social conditions. As the result of the complicated historical and political background, the process of Chinese urbanisation was very tortuous. Under the Communist leadership, China underwent rapid industrialisation without a parallel growth of urban population (Kirkby, 1988). This phenomenon was also closely associated with the unique ideological orientation and developmental policies of the Communist party-state, which almost exclusively shaped the growth patterns of urban areas – sometimes with quite dramatic social and economic outcomes (Chang, 1994). This process deeply affected the development of every aspect of Chinese society including women's participation in sport.

In line with the fluctuating process of urbanisation during the period between 1949 and 1979, Chinese women's participation in sport developed quickly compared to the hundreds of years of Chinese feudal society. Chinese women were encouraged not only to get involved in sport at the grassroots but also to be trained as professional athletes. Behind this phenomenon, what were the real forces and meanings of women's participation in sport? Did Chinese women receive full equality in sport after all? Could Chinese women emancipate their bodies through sport completely in the new country? In order to answer these questions, we should put Chinese women's sports participation in the context of the changes of female body images in the periods of urbanisation between 1949 and 1979, which process also coincided with China's economic cycles and political movements.

5.2 The Start of Socialist Urbanisation: Women's Bodies for Social Production (1949-56)

Since the establishment of the PRC by the CCP in 1949, Chinese society had been transformed from a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country to a socialist independent state. Confronted with a legacy of poverty from over half a century of military threats from abroad, the PRC needed to develop its economy and strengthen its national

defence. Therefore, the creation of a strong state power and economic construction were the immediate tasks (Mao, 1967: 442). After three years of political, economic and ideological consolidation, by 1953 the economy had recovered, land reform was completed, the private sector had been reduced to subservience and the Korean War had ended in a protracted truce. China had been assured there was no obvious obstacle to the initiation of the 'transition to socialism' (Fairbank and Macfarquhar, 1990). China's first 'Five-Year Plan' was established. The new government had established an economically planned system based on the Soviet pattern. Resources were centrally allocated, including intermediate goods. Production was controlled by setting targets not only for output but for all major inputs (Liu, 1991). In line with the Soviet precedent, priority in investment was given to heavy industry, followed by light industry, with agriculture last. In industry, the aim was to create urban, high-technology, capital-intensive and large-scale state-owned enterprises (Crespigny, 1992). The policy of industrialisation accelerated the emergence of new industrial cities located inland, near mines and minerals needed by heavy industry. According to the *Chinese Cities' Statistical Yearbook* (1985), during the period from 1949 to 1956, the number of cities increased from 136 in 1949 to 178 in 1957. To support industrial production, a large number of the labour force entered into urban areas from the villages; in 1950 the total urban population was just 61.69 million, but by 1960 it had increased to 163.48 million. During these 10 years, the annual growth rate reached 10.3% (China Population Information Centre [CPIC], 1988: 159).

Nonetheless, led by the socialist ideological orientation, the increasing numbers of cities and urban population were not seen as the result of the urbanisation of China. They only functioned as a precondition for the Communist Party's strategic task – industrialisation. This could be mirrored by the fact that for developing heavy industry, the light industrial necessities for daily life were in short supply and people's living standards were very low. Within the planned system, goods were distributed not through open, market principles, but through redistributionist channels (Tang and Parish, 2000). As a result, people's consumer activities were rare. In short, the socialist model of urbanisation during this period laid too much stress on industrial production but ignored people's consumption of daily goods. This phenomenon made urban residents producers rather than consumers.

Economic factors were the driving force of the whole society. When industrialisation was launched in the PRC, it resulted in the rapid growth of population entering large-scale enterprises in the cities. People's participation in sport was promoted extensively in urban areas. In order to satisfy the need to consolidate the revolution, recover social production and eventually lead China into a communist society, the state argued that a healthy body was crucial to achieving these aims. Sport therefore was asked to function in order to build healthy workers. Zhu De (1886-1976), the then Vice-President of the PRC, assigned sport a crucial task:

At present our sport must serve the people, serve national defence and serve people's health... In order to undertake the hard work of constructing our new country, sport should promote people's health physically and mentally. Students, workers, peasants, citizens, militants and civil servants all have to become involved in sport.

(Cited in Zhu, 1950: 7)

On the 20th June 1952, Chairman Mao advocated 'developing sport and promoting people's physique' (Xiong, 1995b: 87). This slogan strengthened the main function of sport in this period, and contributed to establishing the importance of sport in people's lives. Sport, especially mass sport, therefore developed rapidly in the heavy industrial sector and big industrial cities (National Sports Commission [NSC thereafter], 1985: 158). The rise of industrial cities provided necessary conditions for the growth of mass sport. Firstly, the sports infrastructure developed along with the construction of public facilities and services in urban areas. Prior to 1949, there were only 26 sports fields and gymnasia in the whole country. By the 1950s, 38 new medium-sized and small sports stadia had been built in big industrial cities such as Beijing, Wuhan, Chongqing, Tianjing, Changchun and Yinchuan. In order to host the First National Sports Meeting in 1959 in Beijing, the Workers Sports Stadium was built, which could provide 80,000 seats for spectators. At that time this was the largest stadium in China (Rong, 1987: 480).

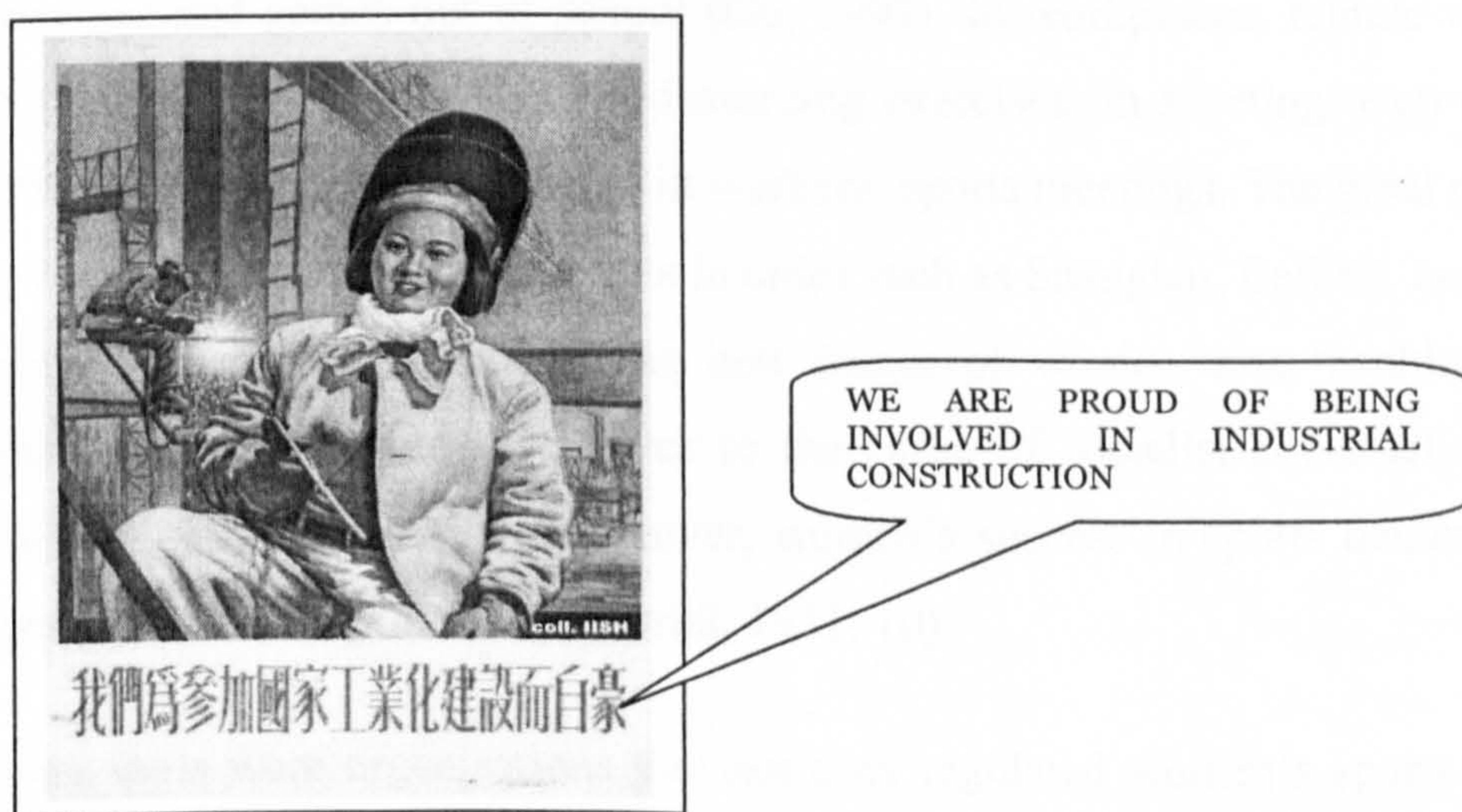
The rise of industrial cities not only contributed to the construction of sports infrastructures but also provided an institutional environment for the establishment of a sports management system. In order to organise and manage people's sports participation, on the 15th November 1952 the State Physical Education and Sports Commission (later called the Sport Ministry) was established (Wu, 1999: 49-51). The

Sport Ministry was in charge of the formulation and implementation of a sports policy in all its forms and the administration of a national sports programme. It liaised closely with other government ministries such as Education and National Defence. Subsequently, many local sports establishments at the level of province, city or county came into being between 1953 and 1954. A centralised system of sports administration was taking shape by the mid-1950s (Xiong, 1995b). In addition, industrial sectors promoted and organised sports participation among workers, and some sports organisations were founded. In October 1955, the All-China Federation of Labour Unions established a sports department to manage workers' sports activities for factories and enterprises throughout the country. The First Workers' Games took place in October 1955 and 1,200,000 worker athletes participated in competitions covering six sports (Wu, 1999: 74). There followed, as a consequence of the success of this development, the construction of sports associations in a variety of industrial sectors and factories such as the 'Railway Sports Association' (1952), the 'Colliery Sports Association' (1955), the 'Forestry Sports Association' (1956) and the 'Heavy Industrial Sports Association' (1956) (Wu, 1999: 74–75). By the end of 1956, there were 19 national workers' sports associations and 25,100 local sports associations affiliated to the All-China Federation of Labour Unions and directly controlled by the government (Hao, 1984: 47–49).

Industrial development required people's participation in sport to build strong bodies and a spirit of collectivism; and in return it provided sport with a physical and institutional environment. Since women were an influential force in the reconstruction of the PRC, their healthy and strong bodies became an important economic consideration in the sport system. Chinese women before 1949 were traditionally restricted at home as housewives. Because the PRC aimed to build a strong industrial base for development, it required an increasingly active female labour force to participate in social production, especially in the industrial sector. Additionally, according to the Marxist theory of women's liberation, the CCP believed that women's emancipation could only be realised after women were involved in large-scale social production instead of being restricted to the family and the home (ACWF, 1990: 152). Thus, Chinese women were encouraged to step out of their homes to take part in economic production and enter the field previously inhabited largely by men (Liu, 2001b: 145). Successive government policies of land reform, the collectivisation

of agriculture and the expansion of the economy's industrial and rural sectors encouraged women to take advantage of the new opportunities to take a full and wide-ranging role in production. In the four years from 1949 to 1953, the female proportion of the urban labour force increased from 7.5 per cent to 11 per cent. Most women workers were in light industry; some women had engaged in heavy industry (Ministry of Labour, 1987: 33). The poster below (Picture 5.1) shows the new image of Chinese women working in heavy industry.

Picture 5.1 Poster of Women in a Factory in the 1950s



Source: CCP's propaganda posters in the 1950s¹

The changes in women's employment resulted in the establishment of a new family system. Based on the Marriage Law² in 1950, the traditional system of marriage, which was identified as a source of female inequality, and more significantly as a barrier to wider participation in socialist production, was eradicated. Moreover, Chinese women obtained rights in education, work, public affairs and marriage decisions (Andors, 1983). In addition, following urban economic reorganisation, the centuries-old extended-kinship structure mostly disappeared in urban areas. Instead, work unit replaced family unit, functioning as the basic unit of production and accounting (Li and Li, 2000). The family therefore was not the only sphere for

¹ Stefan Landsberger's Poster Pages. <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/iron.html>

² The Marriage Law, banning compulsory betrothal, the marriage of children, infanticide, bigamy and concubinage, consists of eight sections and 27 articles.

Chinese women's activities such as bearing children and feeding husbands; the workplace, public activity, economic burdens and political performance (*biaoxian*) constituted the other parts of their lives.

Sports participation as a public activity with specifically economic, political and social meanings, therefore, was promoted extensively among women. In the context of the changes in women's position in the family and society, women's participation in sport and exercises expanded in schools, factories and workplaces in cities. In schools, physical education became a compulsory part of the curriculum. Girls and boys were required to have three PE classes a week plus one hour of physical activities and games out of school (Gu, 1997). In workplaces, female workers were required to take part in organised morning exercises, in sporting team competitions between different work units and in workers' sports meetings. The great performances by female workers in sports events in cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, and Shengyang received particular attention. The new image of women was 'healthy and strong and ...ready to devote themselves to the cause of socialist construction' (*Xin tiyu* Editorial, 1950, No.1: 33). Moreover, women's success in sports demonstrated their sporting potential (*Xin tiyu*, Editorial, 1951: 10).

Work units were organisations that not only regulated women's sports participation but also gave support and backing to their ambition. To lessen the contradictions between familial and extra-familial roles for women in the urban era, during the First 'Five-Year Plan', the Children's Bureau of the Women's Federation assumed the task of getting factories to provide nursery facilities for their female employees (Cadre Management Institute of China [CMIC], 1988: 386). Work units also provided female workers with washrooms, pregnant women with rest rooms and mothers and children with canteens and even dormitories (CMIC, 1988: 405). These measures assisted in the release of women from domestic chores and facilitated women's involvement in work and public activities. They ensured that female workers could have time to participate in exercise and sports. Chinese women's sport at the grassroots was generated for the first time nationwide. It was the prelude to women's further success in breaking through the feudal constraints placed on their bodies, and launched them onto the stage of the PRC.

In summary, between 1949 and 1956, women's participation in sport was promoted and expanded at the grassroots. At this time, mass sport was the main concern (Hong, 2003: 227). Industrial production units were asked to train the female bodies of their employees to be healthy and productive. The expanded urban areas, with the changes in family structure, ensured that women had certain opportunities to participate in sports. In addition, with the rise of large-scale enterprises, a physical environment and sporting concepts which supported women's sport and exercises were established in cities.

However, the stress on the productive tasks of the state and a failure to concentrate on people's individual requirements in sport restricted women's participation in sport. It appeared to be more government-controlled behaviour (managed by workplaces) and political activity rather than a personal choice of activity. With regard to female workers, an interviewee stated:

no matter whether we were willing to or not, we were forced to attend some exercises or sports events.

(Interviewee No. 20, 2004)

Nevertheless, housewives rarely participated in any exercises. This reflected the fact that although the social changes (industrialisation, urbanisation and changes in women's status) had provided external conditions for the development of women's sport, the driving factor, women's own desire to participate in sport, was still very weak. In this sense, the forced sports activities were not really beneficial to women's own needs. On the contrary, they were subject to the political tasks of the state, alienating women from the pleasure and joy of sport.

5.3 Urbanisation Declined: The Start of Women's Elite Sport (1957-66)

By the end of the first 'Five-Year Plan' in 1957 the Communists had achieved real success. At constant prices, the gross output value of industry rose from RMB 14,020 million in 1949 to 34,330 million in 1952 and 78,390 million in 1957. Moreover, though much of the improvement could be attributed simply to peacetime recovery after years of war, the factory sector had been greatly enlarged: between 1953 and

1957 handicraft production increased less than 15 per cent, from RMB 4,720 million value added to 5,380 million, but factory output almost trebled, from RMB 6,450 million to 17,260 million (*Ten Great Years*, 1960: 87). The Chinese people were inspired to speed up their socialist reconstruction to catch up with the West.

During the years 1956 and 1957, the last years of the first 'Five-Year Plan', there was discussion on future development, and at the Third Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in October 1957, Mao Zedong forced through his policy of mass mobilisation to engage the whole of China in a struggle for progress. The 'Great Leap Forward' (GLF) started by emphasising that the whole population should work to accelerate production beyond any previous achievement (Crespigny, 1992). Under the economic and political climate of the GLF, which had a decisive effect on the huge growth in the urban population, the number of state-owned enterprises increased from 58,000 in 1957 to 119,000 in 1958, with more than 10 million new workers and staff migrating into cities from the countryside (NSB, 1984). This rapid growth in the urban industrial economy and comparatively stable urban life gave the cities a magnetic attraction. By 1960 the urban population had increased to 163.48 million and the rate of urbanisation reached a peak at 24.7% (China Population Information Centre [CPIC], 1988: 159). To support the GLF, which needed a large-scale labour force, the slogan 'every one has a job; every household has no idler' [*renren you huo gan; jiajia wu xianren*] was put forward. According to this slogan, a distribution of employment had been established under the planned economic system. Women, a labour reservoir, were massively mobilised for 'social production' as an essential substitute for absent mechanical and technological resources (Hu and Jiang, 2004). This mobilisation was also backed by the belief that women's participation in 'social production' was an important means of liberating women (Li et al., 1992). A campaign of ideological indoctrination was launched to urge women to be economically independent in order to achieve full emancipation. Wives' dependence on their husbands was criticised. As a result, housewives and unemployed women were quickly deployed to state-owned enterprises or collective enterprises. The number of women in employment rose from 33 million in 1957 to 100 million in 1960 (Jiang, 2001: 154).

This consolidation of women's status in employment continued to support their participation in sport. In order to meet the needs of a healthy labour force, mass sport continued to be promoted throughout the country. 'Sport Weeks' and 'Sports Months' were organised and a campaign of 'Ten-Minute Broadcast Exercises'³ was launched across the country in 1958 (see Picture 5.2). In addition, the Soviet model, 'Preparation for Labour and Defence' (*laoweizhi*) was adopted. Two hundred million men and women were expected to pass the fitness grade of *laoweizhi* (NSC, 1958) (see Picture 5.3). Exercises were arranged for workers at their break times in the morning. Varieties of amateur competitive games were organised among staff. Female workers now took part on a scale not previously experienced in all kinds of physical activity programmes organised for workers by the trade unions, to ensure fitness for maximum productivity (Dong, 2003: 50). As a verse written in 1959 illustrated 'exercise has brought changes to women; a weak girl has turned into an iron one' (Zhuang, 1959: 7-10).

Picture 5.2 Ten-Minute Broadcast Exercises by Female Textile Workers in a Factory in Shanghai in the 1950s



Source: Shanghai Sports Commission, 1999

³ This was an every important form of exercise in workplaces and schools. It was designed by the National Sports Council and required to be held in every city and town. Workers and students exercised all together in the morning break along with broadcast music. This was why it was called 'broadcast exercise'.

Picture 5.3 ‘Women’s *laoweizhi* Competition’ in the 1950s

50年代推行“劳卫制”

Source: CGAS, 2002

Picture 5.3 shows the girls’ running competition, which conveyed an ideology of using sporting competition to turn girls into tough and strong women.

Under the direction of the GLF, the government set a high target for developing not only mass sport but also achieving a high standard of elite sport (Wu, 1999: 100). The development of women’s elite sport was an urgent requirement. After the Helsinki Olympic Games⁴ in 1952, the state realised that elite sport had a powerful function in

⁴ The Helsinki Olympic Games was an important event in the history of Chinese elite sport. Before the Helsinki Olympic Games, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) had faced an acute political problem in deciding whether Communist China in Beijing or Nationalist China in Taiwan should represent China at the Olympic Games. Although Beijing and Taiwan were both invited, they responded to the IOC with same inflexible attitudes: Beijing would not go to the games unless Taiwan was expelled and Taiwan refused to compete with the Communists on the same sports field. Taiwan immediately withdrew from the games in protest. The Helsinki Olympic Games started on the 19th July, and Beijing received an official invitation only on the previous day. One week later, a delegation consisting of 40 members from the PRC appeared in Helsinki. Although they missed most of the

achieving status on the international stage. Chen Yin, the then Vice-prime Minister of State argued:

Sport was not just playing ball. It reflected our country's image, force, spirit and the superiority of our socialist society. The achievements in sport were the glory of our country and people.

(*Xin tiyu* [New sport], 1963, No.5: 12)

These new focuses assigned sport another heavy task, to reconstruct the image of the PRC internally and externally. In other words, the state aimed to consolidate national identity by erasing the image of China as a 'sick man' and winning world honour through high performances on the international sports stage. With abundant sports investment from the government and in the climate of the GLF, in which rapid and ambitious targets were pursued in every project throughout the country, the elite sports system was constructed. In 1956, the Sports Ministry issued 'The Competitive Sports System of the PRC'. Based on this system, 43 sports were officially recognised as competitive sports; rules and regulations were implemented; professional teams were set up at provincial and national levels; National Games would take place every four years; and spare-time sport schools (*yeyu tixiao*) were established to train and advance talented athletes from a young age (Hong, 2003). Consequently, the numbers of both female athletes and female coaches increased considerably (Dong, 2003: 48).

The emergence of the female elite sport was not only the result of the political demands of the state and the elite sport system, but also the consequence of changing attitudes to women in sport. Some women were willing to devote themselves to sport and vigorously challenged conservative ideas about women's participation in competitive sport. They set a new norm of social expectation for women (Dong, 2003: 49). Under the rapid growth of economic and political ambitions and the comparative stability of the social order, it was expected that Chinese sport would develop under the 'two legs walking system': elite sport and mass sport developed simultaneously (Wu 1999: 102–106).

competitions, Prime Minister Zhou stated that it was a great victory simply to raise the national flag at the Olympic Games, whether the PRC could compete in the events or not. It meant Communist China had won an important political battle. From then on, Communist China came to recognise the importance of the sports on the international stage (Hong and Xiong, 2002: 322-3).

However, this tendency did not last long. In line with the failure of the GLF, the pace of urbanisation gradually slowed down and then declined dramatically, profoundly affecting women's participation in sport. In the early 1950s, the state had attempted to speed up the urban industrial economy at the expense of agricultural development. The GLF accelerated this process. The outflow of rural labourers severely hampered the development of the agricultural sector and reduced output and growth. Although the government made efforts to stop the outflow of rural labour, farmers still moved to the cities. As a result the country suffered shortages of food, shortages of raw materials for industry, overproduction of poor-quality goods, and the deterioration of industrial plants through mismanagement. The unbalanced development between industry and agriculture made the cities unable to sustain the burden of a large population. Besides the economic situation, the waves of peasant migration stimulated by industrialisation were soon perceived as a threat not only to the productive role of cities, but to the very existence of Communist power⁵ (Kirkby, 1988). The prevention of continuing migration to the cities and the diminishing of existing urban populations were priorities in dealing with this issue.

The measures to control urbanisation divided broadly into passive measures, which aimed at preventing uncontrolled movement into the urban areas, including the establishment of a residents' registration system (*Hukou zhidu*)⁶ and a rationing system (*liangpiao zhi*)⁷; and active measures, which were designed to rid the cities of large numbers of unwanted and sometimes undesirable inhabitants. It included the movements of sending down (*xia fang*)⁸ (Kirkby, 1988). In doing so, the Chinese

⁵ Although the Chinese Communist Party gained support from peasants and defined itself as a union of workers and peasants, it still feared a powerful peasant's movement from the countryside, which could result in another peasants' revolution and threaten the reign of the workers.

⁶ Article 10 of the 1958 law declared that each household should have a 'permanent registration booklet' (*hukou bu*). The registration system divided the entire population between those with 'urban residence' (*chengshi hukou*) and those having 'rural residence' (*nongcun hukou*). The purpose was not merely to monitor population movements, but to anchor people to their native places, and – in particular – to prevent unauthorised movement from countryside to the city.

⁷ *Liang piao zhi* was provisional regulations for the supply of fixed quantities of grain in the cities. The administration of the grain rationing system varies from province to province, but in all cases it is dependent on the individual's possession of the urban household registration documents. Grain was merely supplied to the family, which was assigned by the registration police at the neighbourhood. Thus, the migrants from distant places could not buy any grain, in which way the government tried to control the immigration.

⁸ The decanting of the urban population down the urban hierarchy and ultimately to the villages was known as '*xia fang*'. The sending-down programmes involved different urban groups: urban youth, cadres, skilled labour and criminal elements. Although different sending-down campaigns had served particular ends, they were held together by a common thread – the necessity for the Party to maintain a

government controlled the speed of urbanisation. From 1961 to 1964, about 30 million people were sent to the countryside and the urban population was reduced from 163.48 million in 1960 to 130.45 million in 1965 (Wei, 1985: 28–35).

The failure of the GLF brought economic disaster to workers in the urban areas. Heavy industrial production was halved and the government cut back on all state investment. Twenty million workers lost their jobs, and most of them were women. People's living standards declined sharply in 1960, and the population dropped by about 20 million from 1959 to 1961 (CPIC, 1988: 159). Against this background, mass sport lost its economic support and population base. Women's participation in sport at the grassroots declined as soon as they lost jobs and were sent to villages.

Nevertheless, women's elite sport had developed since 1961. Due to the limited investment in sport and people suffering famine, it was difficult to launch large-scale sports activities among people at the grassroots (Wu, 1999: 113). Therefore, the government determined to use the best of its limited resources to give special and intensive training to potential athletes in a particular sport so that they could compete on the international sports stage (Hong, 2003). The sports target changed from training healthy citizens into producing elite sports athletes. Women's sport altered its focus and quickly joined the development of Chinese elite sports systems and practices.

National and local governments and sports bodies provided opportunities, in terms of finance, coaching and training, to young girls who had talent. Specialised teams and sports schools acted as a bridge between amateur and professional athletes, which, like a big factory, trained young girls to be sportswomen. In doing so, the government not only continued to confirm its gender policy that emphasised 'women can hold up half of the sky', but also used it as a political vehicle to gain international recognition for Communist China. In the four-year period from 1961 to 1965, female athletes won three world championships and broke world records 40 times (Wu 1999: 558). Since then, women athletes had become national heroines and regarded as icons of women's emancipation, symbols of gender equality. Picture 5.4 shows the heroine image of female athletes in this period.

stable and manageable urban polity in a situation of severely constrained central investments in the non-productive urban fabric and insufficiency in grain supply.

Picture 5.4 Welcome for Female Parachutists of the PRC in the 1960s



Source: CCP's propaganda posters in the 1960s.⁹

In conclusion, the period between 1957 and 1966 witnessed a declining tendency towards urbanisation caused by the radical movement of the GLF and its negative impact on Chinese society. During this time, women's participation in mass sport flourished in accordance with the peak of urbanisation in 1959 and then disappeared along with the dramatic decline of urbanisation after the failure of the GLF. Like women's mass sport before the GLF, sport during the GLF was a regimented collective activity and many women were required to be involved by the pressure of the political climate in workplaces rather than by an awakened consciousness of increased opportunity for self-expression. Sport was more a politically enforced mass movement rather than a popular mass revolution. As a result, in the post-GLF period, as soon as women left the workplace and were sent to rural areas without specific institutional support, their participation in sport declined dramatically.

Nevertheless, driven by the political function of sport, women's elite sport had developed quickly since 1961 when the Chinese elite sports system and training system were constructed. The women's sporting body became a new icon of women's liberation and a symbol of gender equality (Hong, 2003). However, since women's

⁹ Source: Stefan Landsberger's Poster Pages. <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/iron.html>

elite sport was tightly controlled by political institutions, in order to win glory for the state and the party, the female athlete's body was misused. Hard, disciplined military-type training was designed to inculcate qualities of hardiness in the face of difficulty and injury; toughness of spirit and body; and skill in competition. Chinese women's traditional virtues and qualities, such as endurance and obedience, were emphasised by the so-called 'sports spirit'. As Hua Shaolin, who broke world records four times in parachuting in the 1960s recalled:

In that time, the demand of motherland was absolutely superior to personal reasons. In order to win glory for the nation or province, we absolutely devoted ourselves to extremely tough training and competitions.

(Hua Shaolin, 2003)

The creation of the elite sportswomen was an idea which was to serve the political purposes of the state. Therefore, in the subsequent social disaster that resulted from political movement, the ideology and practices of producing elite female athlete were under attack.

5.4 Anti-Urbanisation: Creating Women's Androgynous Bodies (1967-79)

By 1965, the economy of China had largely recovered from the GLF and the famine that followed. However, a new political movement – the Cultural Revolution – was launched in 1966. China again entered a specific period of social chaos which immersed every aspect of Chinese society. This campaign, launched by Mao Zedong, was aimed, in a cultural sense, at developing 'correct consciousness' among the people; stressing an 'ideological remoulding' (Xi and Jin, 1996). It required the total elimination of the pernicious influence of traditional values and old ideas and the 'proletarianisation' of the consciousness of the people. The Cultural Revolution was not only intended to revolutionise Chinese culture (Wei, 1998), but also intended to build a pure proletarian social order against any capitalist tendencies in social life. For Mao, cities were locations of temptation and insidious corruption, being filled with a bourgeois atmosphere; urban life was the 'sugar-coated bullet' which might threaten

the very heart of the revolution (Hu, 1991). As a result, anti-urbanisation (or anti-urbanism) started.

Under this ideology, the most rigorous movement of 'up to the mountains and down to the villages' (*shangshan xia xiang*) was to come. In 1968, earlier admonitions to youth were re-emphasised by the leadership in Beijing, urging young people to go to the countryside to be re-educated by poor peasants. Over the next 10 years (1968-1978), around 16.23 million young people were involved in this movement (Tan, 1987); thus about 10 percent of the urban population had been sent to the countryside (Su, 1999). The government also transferred cadres and skilled workers to the countryside to participate in agricultural work (Wei, 1998). This movement made the cities and towns lose tens of thousands of their population (Ma, 1988). As a result, the PRC suffered from economic collapse. The gross national product dropped from 306.2 billion yuan in 1966 to 264.8 billion yuan in 1968 (NSB, 1985: 20). In urban areas, factories, urban infrastructures, public service facilities, schools, hospitals, shops, markets and even families' lives were seriously damaged. Chinese cities were in chaos. However, in this specific political climate, women's sport was reinforced as part of the Cultural Revolution.

From its beginning, the Cultural Revolution attempted to promote an equal society by rebelling against the old authorities. Economically, it utilised the geographic and demographic measures of anti-urbanisation, through sending educated urban youth into the countryside and aiming to bridge the gap between city dwellers and peasants. Ideologically, in order to criticise 'the bourgeois road', the Cultural Revolution aimed to fight against the urban way of life that stressed the civil rights of city dwellers.

Therefore, it used many radical measures¹⁰ to replace individualism with totalitarianism, collectivism and nationalism in urban areas. Against this background, the women's emancipation movement could be viewed as an approach to this revolutionary goal. The aim of women's liberation led by the CCP was to eliminate gender differences. As stressed before, the Communist leadership assumed that gender inequality was rooted in gender differences, especially women's physical disadvantages. To build gender equality needed women to challenge this physical

¹⁰ The measures included the Red Guard Movement, the anti-'Four Old Things' campaign, attacking 'Five Types of Black Elements' and so on.

disadvantage and to create an androgynous image. Chinese women were forced to give up their femininity (an important psychological blow to the 'self'), while men maintained their masculinity and in fact were strengthened by women becoming surrogate men. In this context, the elimination of gender differences did not build real gender equality, because when women 'became' men, they lost the right to produce their own voices and seek their own needs as women. As a result, the women's liberation movement actually contributed to reinforcing masculine supremacy and establishing society's male-dominated order.

To disseminate the ideology of women's equality with men, Chinese radicals, especially Jiang Qing, Mao's wife, who rose to political prominence during the Cultural Revolution, launched series of campaigns. 'Model Operas'¹¹ were exclusively shown day and night to present a wholesome image of revolutionary heroines and portray women as militant fighters for revolution, ready to sacrifice family for the cause (Judd, 1989: 265–282). These operas challenged the concept of the traditional family and historical femininity (see Picture 5.5).

Picture 5.5 Revolutionary Women in 'Model Operas' in the 1960s



'Women's political activists, robust and irony gaze into the distance, their eyes shining with revolutionary zeal.'

Source: Propaganda Pictures of the Cultural Revolution,¹² 2005

Jiang Qing also led the campaign of 'criticising Lin Biao and Confucius' (1973-76), which marked the beginning of another effort to change long-standing perceptions of

¹¹ Two years before Revolution, Jiang Qing gave 'a Statement on the Revolutionary Beijing Opera', at the 'Watch and emulation meeting' of the Beijing Opera and Modern Operas.

¹² <http://vod.zzu.edu.cn/forum/printpage.asp?BoardID=5&ID=137648>

women in the Cultural Revolution. Because the Confucian tradition had long been perceived as responsible for attitudes, values and behaviour inimical to socialist development, this fresh critique of Confucianism naturally led to a criticism of Confucian authority, which was regarded as the root of women's oppression in China's feudal society. Women in all walks of life, once more, were organised to study and analyse the origins and development of an ideological system in which the oppression of women was a fundamental premise (CMIC, 1988). This campaign refreshed women's consciousness regarding equality. In practice, women were encouraged to follow Mao's famous words that 'anything men can do, women can do'.

Since being sent to the villages, young educated women had worked with men in the fields. There were virtually no gender differences in work. As an interviewee said:

Girls had to work harder than boys to demonstrate the power of 'half the sky'. The image of 'Iron Girls' – strong, robust, muscular women who performed physically in jobs traditionally done by men – was highly praised. The impressive work records would make it possible for girls to be recommended to return to cities as workers, soldiers or college students.

(Interviewee No. 7, 2003)

Apart from manual work, male and female bodies were similarly clad with minimal stylistic modifications in an attempt to reduce or negate gender-specific differences. Cosmetics, colourful clothes, skirts and tight trousers were considered degenerate 'bourgeois goods'. Jiang Qing herself appeared in military attire, symbolising a presumably gender-neutral style. An interviewee remembered:

During the Cultural Revolution, women wore olive green army clothes, with a PLA (Peoples' Liberation Army of China) cap, or they wore blue or grey clothes with baggy pants just like men, so from behind, you couldn't tell they were women. If a Red Guard saw someone who was dressed in a 'bourgeois style' – dresses too short, blouse too colourful, high heels or curly hair – she would be criticised and forced to cut her hair. In the dominant language of class at that time, to look feminine meant to be like a 'bourgeois', while a revolutionary image could only be coarse and manly.

(Interviewee No. 25, 2003)

As Jung Chang (1991) has argued, in the period of the Cultural Revolution, any discussion of women's specific problems was declared bourgeois; and femininity, or

any assertion of a specifically female identity, was denounced. In a word, the new image of women was built to strengthen sameness, rejecting sexual difference, divisions, asymmetry and hierarchy and to symbolise equality for women (Croll, 1995). The state presided over the erasure of gender in the discursive and visual public realm of the mass media. Women's sports participation correspondingly was asked to demonstrate Chinese women's physical strength and show their masculinity.

Similarly, in other sectors of Chinese society, the Communist sport system was affected by social disorder in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. Due to the economic decline, sports investment by the government fell annually from 89.96 million yuan in 1966 to 27.39 million yuan in 1968 (Department of Sports History and Literature, 1992: 12). The diminishing sports funding led to a reduction of elite sports teams and athletes. Some 13 national elite sports were abandoned. The number of elite athletes dropped from 11,292 in 1965 to 6,288 in 1970 (NSC, 1979: 16–18). The Chinese elite sports system was seriously attacked and female elite sport virtually disappeared. Nonetheless, women's sports activities at the mass level did not decline. On the contrary, they flourished in cities and the countryside with the lack of leisure activities. Picture 5.6 shows women skipping with ropes in the fields after work.

Picture 5.6 Women Skipping with Ropes in the Fields in the 1960s



Source: *Heilongjiang Sports Records*, 1997

As the Director of the Sports Department in Fucheng district, Mianyang, indicates:

Self-evidently, during the Cultural Revolution, participation in sports activities was very popular in city neighbourhoods although the sports infrastructures were very poor. Subjectively, at that time cultural lives in urban areas were very poor and sports activities were one of the few leisure activities that was not banned by the government. Therefore, under the specific political climate, participation in mass sport activities was comparatively safe for urban people to avoid being criticised.

(Interviewee No. 34, 2004)

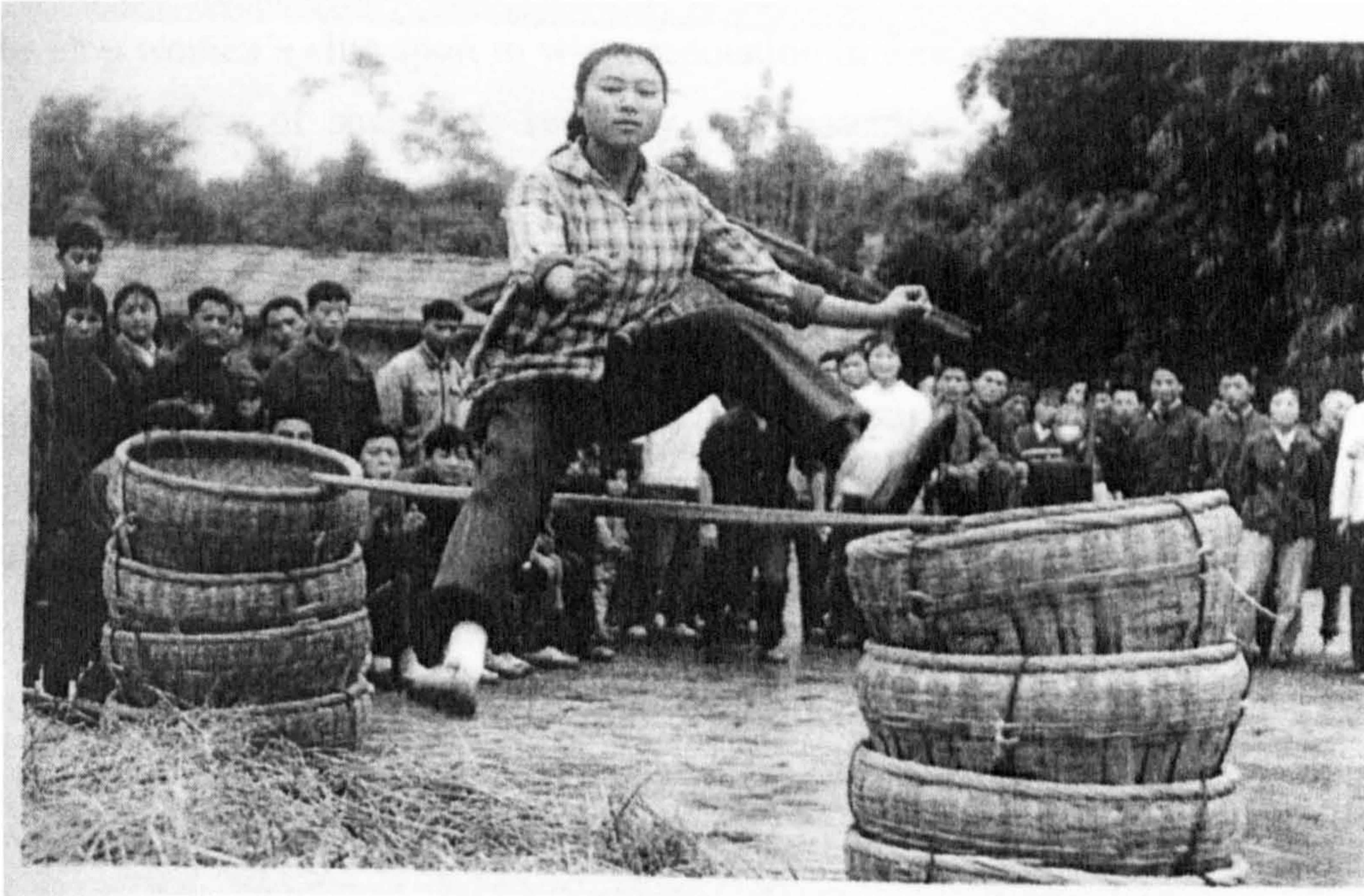
Women's mass sport under these circumstances flourished. It kept its role as a method of demonstrating women's physical potential and to fight against traditional conventions. To counteract gender discrimination in sport, in almost every large factory or work unit women's basketball and volleyball teams were organised (Wu, 1999). One interviewee stated:

Sport was one of activities that were recognised as decent and respectable for city citizens for building the collectivist spirit and strong bodies. And for women, we were taught to change the weak image of female body through sport, and it seemed a political doctrine that we could compete with men in sport.

(Interviewee No 29, 2004)

In rural areas also, women were encouraged to participate in sporting activities. Once urban youths were sent down to villages and the countryside, they took with their advanced knowledge, skills, concepts and also a vivid urban lifestyle that included sport (Wu, 1999: 192). Rural women were organised to participate in some sports activities. For example, according to a media report in 1975, in Xiaofanzhuan Brigade, Nanyao County, Heibei province, over 70 per cent of the women in Daxin Brigade participated in sport (*Sports Daily*, February the 24th, 1975). In Zhangtai County, Fujian province, women could swim in the river, which challenged traditional custom (*Xin tiyu* 1973, No. 9: 4–5). Picture 5.7 shows women utilising farm tools to practise high-jumping.

Picture 5.7 Women High-Jumping on a Farm in the Early 1970s



Source: *Sichuan Sports Records*, 1998

With regard to women's elite sport, although it almost disappeared in the early years of the Cultural Revolution as the result of the criticism of the elite sports system, it recovered in 1971 when the economy was taking a turn for the better.¹³ With the recovery of domestic stability, the attention of the state had turned to entry into the international arena. Sport played a crucial role in restoring Chinese diplomatic relations with Western countries (Wu, 1999: 176–177). The episode was known as 'ping-pong diplomacy',¹⁴ (Wu, 1999: 235; Hong and Xiong, 2002). Thereafter, elite sport recaptured the attention of the state and functioned as a vehicle for improving international relations.

¹³ The convening of the Ninth Party Congress in April 1969 marked the end of the most destructive phase of the Cultural Revolution. The Party and government administration began to slowly build the foundations of society. After the Party Deputy chairman and defence minister Lin Biao allegedly died in a plane crash in Mongolia in 1971, many officials criticised and dismissed between 1966 and 1969 were reinstated. Consequently, in the early 1970s, the economic situation improved and sporting investment increased steadily.

¹⁴ After the Thirty-first World Table Tennis Championships held in Japan from 25th January to 3rd February 1971, US table tennis players received an invitation from the Chinese government to visit China on the 14th April 1971. The Americans immediately invited the Chinese team to the United States. Without hesitation this time, the Chinese government gave a positive response. It had opened a new chapter in the relations between America and China. The diplomatic door was opened by table tennis (Ping-pong). This event marked the start of 'ping-pong diplomacy'.

Women's competitive sport consequently was back on the agenda. During this time, the development of female competitive sport had two tasks: firstly, the state attempted to develop women's elite sport to win a reputation in foreign countries and to display the achievements of socialism; secondly, the masculine image of female athletes could contribute to erasing the differences between the two sexes, which again assisted to establishing an androgynous society. Supported by the gender policy and sports ambitions, Chinese female athletes gained opportunities to stand on the international sports stage. From 1977 to 1981, women athletes won twenty-three championships in gymnastics, acrobatic gymnastics, shooting, diving, badminton, table tennis and volleyball (Ma, 1990: 296–297). This massive achievement by women's sport helped pave the way for the success of Chinese women athletes after the Cultural Revolution (Hong, 2003).

In conclusion, the period between 1966 and 1976 witnessed a long period of chaos in Chinese society. Although many institutions in Chinese society had been attacked dramatically, women's sport survived and was consolidated by the specific political climate brought about by social change. The Cultural Revolution attempted to build an absolutely equal society, aiming to suppress bourgeois thoughts and lifestyle in the cities and to stress collectivism instead of individualism. Women were required to involve themselves in this 'Great Revolution' and to play an important role in building up a new social order – an androgynous system. Participation in sport by women, therefore, was called for them to challenge the masculine world.

On the one hand, this created opportunities for thousands of girls and women to participate in sport and enabled them to develop their physical capability and psychological independence. Women's sport both at the grassroots level and at elite level took advantage of this climate. Women's bodies were empowered and embodied in the ideology and action of the Cultural Revolution. On the other hand, women's participation in sport had not built real gender equality, for women were warmly invited into the men's sphere: they contributed to a male-dominated revolution and social order rather than to women's own development. Femininity was criticised; the female gender identity was the iron image of female body. As a result, gender, especially female gender, was culturally invisible. Women's specific self-expression,

self-fulfilment and self-realisation as human beings were suppressed. As an interviewee stated:

During that time, you only felt like a woman when you gave birth; at other times you didn't exist as a woman. It was only when you became pregnant and your body swelled up that the category of gender intruded on your self-identity and all saw the physical markers of your sex.

(Hua Shaolin, 2003)

Since women's self-identity was not really constructed in line with the women's emancipation movement of the Cultural Revolution, women's participation in sport had not been driven by women's self-consciousness and self-demands. Without a self-driven force, women's sport could not proceed further. That was why in the late period of the Cultural Revolution, although women's elite sport developed very quickly with strong support from the state because of its diplomatic and political status, women's sport at the grassroots remained at a low level or even declined.

5.5 Conclusion and Discussion: Anti-urbanism,¹⁵ Female Body and Women's Sport (1949–79)

Chinese society, since the second decade of the twentieth century, had been the object of a revolution intended to change it in fundamental ways. The revolution aimed at nothing less than the complete transformation of every aspect of the semi-feudal and semi-imperialist society. Amidst the tremendous struggle and sacrifice of a people's war, the PRC was born. The new leadership of the CCP was highly disciplined and embarked on the project of reconstructing China for its transition to a socialist/communist society. Industrialisation and modernisation were the goals of the development programme, whereas urbanisation was excluded from it. The party leadership was determined to limit city growth overall – to achieve 'industrialisation without urbanisation' to avoid the evils of urbanisation associated with economic

¹⁵ Here the title uses urbanism but not urbanisation. It is because generally, urbanisation was a process including geographic, demographic, economic, political and cultural transformation. During the period of 1949-1979, urbanisation, especially in geographic, demographic and economic meanings, happened. And the Chinese government did not clearly show the attitudes of anti-urbanisation. However, urbanism, defined as a cultural meaning of changes of way of life was ignored, controlled and even against by the government. Anti-urbanism, here represents an attitude and ideology of the CCP towards urban life.

development in the Western world. This resulted in a contradiction: on the one hand, the state attempted to speed up the urban industrial economy with the financial sacrifice of agriculture; on the other hand, it was obliged to introduce strong measures to restrain urban growth and the rise of urban population. In addition, urbanisation in the PRC aimed to promote 'producer' rather than 'consumer' cities that would serve the needs of industrial growth rather than the demands of resident consumers.

In these circumstances, national development to a certain extent had been speeded up, but the individual's demands for urban life were ignored. As a result, although urbanisation as a geographic and demographic phenomenon had happened in line with socialist industrialisation, institutionally and culturally it had not really emerged in the PRC. In urban areas, although such issues as social services and amenities, family life, equality, security and the structure of urban administration contributed to achieve a high level of stability and security under the strong control of government in urban centres, Chinese cities had no true citizenry. Chinese cities were not thought to have produced any self-governing organisations comparable to the bourgeois institution of Western cities. Consequently, through the powerfully centralised planning system, the nation became the centre of social life, while individuals lost the freedom to fulfil themselves through choosing their own lifestyles, attitudes and urban values. Urbanism, identified as the spirit of urbanisation, did not happen in Chinese society between 1949 and 1979.

The Chinese women's emancipation movement was driven back by this climate. It was essentially defined by its objective of the 'erasure of gender differences by creating the androgynous female body'. Chinese women were urgently required to change from a traditional femininity to masculinity. The goal of dismantling the differences between the female body and the male body, in fact, tended to contribute to the building of the concepts of a unitary society and to the erasing of the concept of the individual. Thus Chinese society during this period appeared strongly masculine. However, the new definition of female characteristics and women's qualities made Chinese women confused as to their gender identities as individuals, which resulted in tremendous sufferings for Chinese women when they met the practical problems of everyday life. The female body was released from Confucianism in 1949, but was re-

bonded by the new patriarchy: Communism. The female sporting body could not avoid this fate.

The female sporting body was a very special location for creating women's 'iron body' and 'masculine image'. It served to transmute the image of Chinese women from physical weakness into a powerful body, eventually achieving the aim of breaking the gender boundary. For this reason, women's participation in sport was highly promoted after 1949. Training the body, or taking part in sports, was not merely seen as promoting women's health to serve national defence and production, but also as inspiring the collective work spirit necessary for the national unity that was considered a prerequisite for national construction. To achieve this, every woman had to participate in physical education and sports activities. This mass participation, moreover, added a political component to sports. Besides mass sport, Chinese women also achieved great honours for the nation in the sports world in a comparatively short time. They were treated as heroines, symbolising women's liberation.

Some Chinese sports officials explain that women's success in sport in this period was attributable to their equal access and opportunity within sport, to women's propensity for hard work and obedience and, more recently, to support from men (He, 1995; Zhang, 1995). In addition to this point of view, some Chinese scholars go further. They argue that women's stunning accomplishments in sport were an outcome of the combination of male dominance in the wider society with a much more equal environment in the sports community, in which gender bias against women scarcely existed and competition and success were encouraged (Lu, et al., 1995).

After examining the original forces, functions, procedures and forms of women's sport between 1949 and 1979, we might discover it was always masculine power that led women's acts and attitudes towards sporting activities. Chinese women were subject to this masculine power. Just as with capitalist sport, the Communist sport system was a male-dominated sphere, representing the interests of the patriarchal authority – the state and the party. What the state cared about was not female participants but what they could bring to the country. As a result, from the perspective of the state and the party (which were all male-dominated), Chinese women's participation in sport successfully carried out the political tasks of the state, bringing the new country benefits and honours internally and externally. Ironically, for women

participants themselves, their achievement in the sports arena did not really offer Chinese women opportunities to emancipate themselves from the patriarchal power. Women's sport was instrumentalised and alienated. Thus, although Chinese women were mobilised to take part in sport, they could not use their bodies to fulfil their own needs, desires and rights as independent individuals; in contrast, the female sporting body was suppressed by enforcing masculinity.

The dramatic and brutal patriarchal traditions that resulted in the physical repression of the female body in Chinese history make the physical freedom of Chinese women an issue of special significance (Hong, 1997). As sports feminists argued participation in sport is one of the effective ways to liberate the female body physically, psychologically and culturally. However, it needs certain economic, political and cultural conditions to stimulate it. In the period between 1949 and 1979, under the direction of anti-urbanism, Chinese society did not possess the social conditions for women's full involvement in sport. This was reflected by the fact that Chinese women's success in sport was not generated by society's equal gender system but was rather produced by the Communist gender policy and the political functions of a unique sports system. Based on the reality of gender relations in Chinese society in this period, women's achievements in sport could not therefore completely demonstrate that women had gained equity in the sports system.

According to critical theories, sport changes with historical conditions and new developments in government, education, the media, religion and family. It also changes according to new ideas about masculinity and femininity, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and physical ability (Coakley, 2001). Since the 1980s, the Chinese market economy has been taking the place of the planned economy. The transformation of the economic system has created a new mode of urbanisation, which has been the new and powerful social force of China's development. This phenomenon has stimulated the research to seek, in the new process of urbanisation in China, whether the improving social conditions can provide women with equal access to sport and bring new practical and symbolic meanings for participation for Chinese women.

Chapter Six

Urbanisation and the Transformation of Women's Sports Participation

6.1 Introduction

Since the 1980s the 'economic reformation'¹ has played a crucial role in leading China to a fundamental change in every aspect of the society (Wei and Wang, 1997). The Chinese government accepted that urbanisation was an objective law in the development of a commodity economy and was a trend that could not be abstracted (Kirkby, 1988). This perspective accelerated a new process of urbanisation (Association of Chinese Mayors, 2003). Unlike the urbanisation from 1949 to 1979, which took place as a simply geographic and demographic transformation without containing the true spirit of urban life, the new urbanisation under the economic reform was a real transition from rural to urban society (Chang, 1994). It was conducive to the transformation of China from backwardness to modernity in terms of the technology of production and the orientation of individuals, social institutions and cultural concepts. Chinese urban areas accordingly have become 'complex systems – internally differentiated, interdependent, and integrated' (Skinner 1985: 281). There was a flow of goods, services, people, specialised knowledge and information, property and money to cities (Leeds, 1980: 19). Urbanisation since then has become one of the most significant and influential phenomena in China.

Chinese sport as a social institution has been fundamentally influenced by urbanisation. In conjunction with the vigorous economic, political and social transformations caused by the urbanisation, Chinese sport has undergone a substantial process of industrialisation, commercialisation, decentralisation and privatisation (Wu, 1999). Urbanisation has changed the sports infrastructure, sports values and sports participation. Against this background, Chinese women's sport has emerged with new spaces, forms, contents and concepts. Although female elite sport was still

¹ The economic reform was aimed at creating market institutions and converting the economy from an administratively driven command economy to a price-driven market economy.

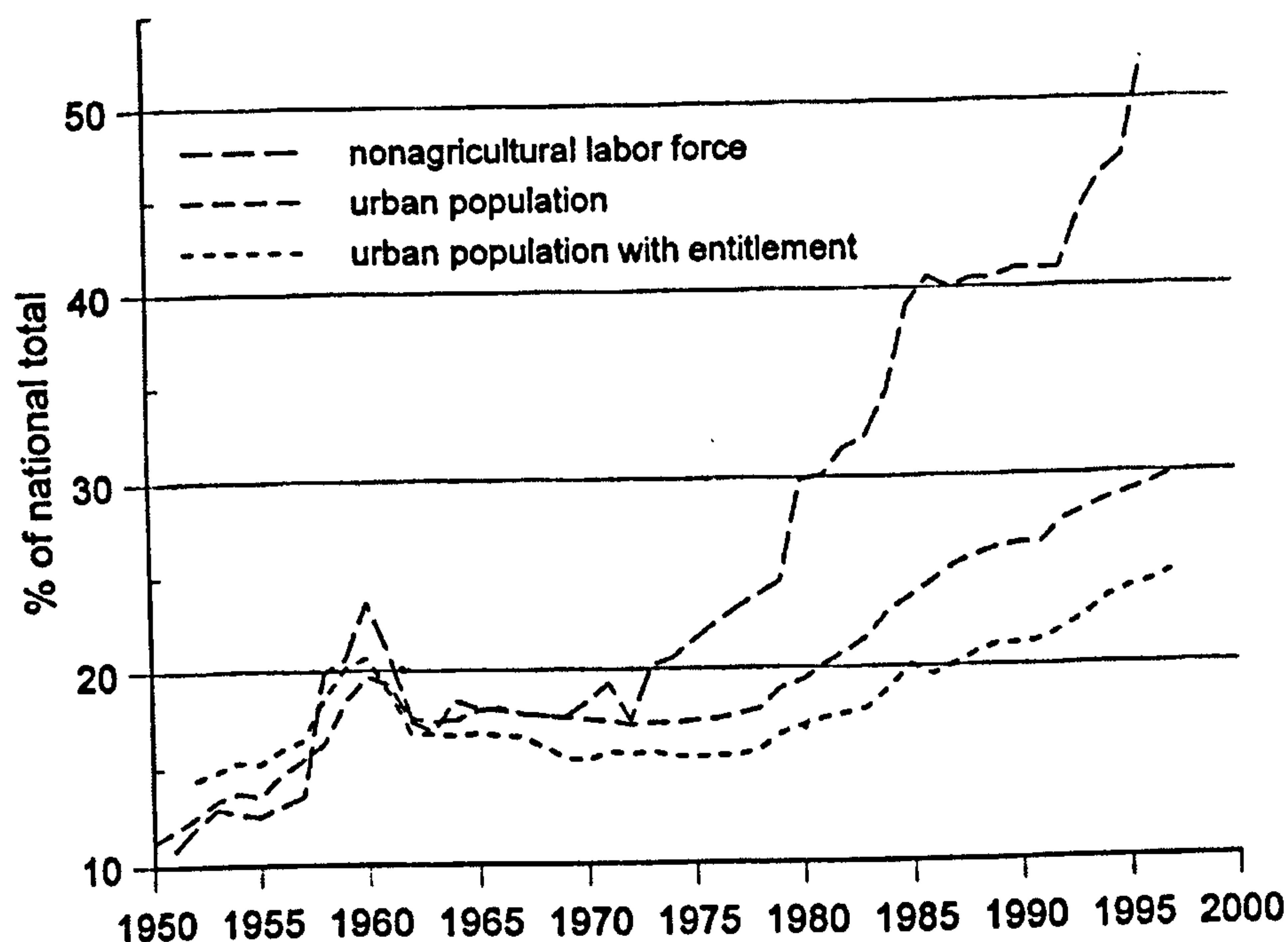
tightly controlled by the state as a political instrument, women's sport at the grassroots has been released as an individual and social activity and became a new element in women's urban life. This chapter will examine how urbanisation has shaped the transformation of women's participation in sport at the grassroots from 1980 to 2000.

6.2 Urbanisation under Economic Reform

In the 1980s, the Chinese Communist Party broke away from the long bondage of 'leftist' practice and embraced pragmatic economic and social reform.² Urbanisation was universally seen as a direct indication of modernisation, and caused development and economic growth to re-emerge in China. This urbanisation was comprehensively based on economic, social and cultural factors and the individual's social and personal needs (Dai, 1999). Released from the restriction of political ideology, urbanisation developed rapidly. From 1980 to 1989, the level of urbanisation³ in China increased from around 19.4% to 26.2%, then rose to 30.9% in 1999 (Association of Chinese Mayors, 2003: 23). It grew to 37.7 % by the end of 2000 (*Xinhua News*, 16th September 2004) (see Figure 6.1).

² The Pivotal Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on the 22nd December 1978 announced the beginning of a series of fundamental changes to the whole of society in China. Economic reform and the open-up policy was the core of this plenum.

³ The level of urbanisation was basically calculated by measuring the urban population, non-agricultural labour force and urban population with entitlement.

Figure 6.1 Urbanisation in China from 1950 to 2000

Source: Population Research Institute (PRI), 1987, 1993, 1996; National Statistics Bureau (NSB), 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000.

6.2.1 The New Pattern of Urbanisation since the 1980s

The new urbanisation was the consequence of the development of the market economy. Industrialisation was the primary force. It emphasised that industrial restructuring should be achieved to expand labour-intensive consumer goods industries as well as to develop service sectors such as communication and transportation (Kueh, 1989). In this way, the development of heavy, light and tertiary industries has been balanced in order to satisfy the different needs of the state and individuals.

When heavy industrial production increased the growth of relatively large cities such as provincial capitals and northeastern China's industrial centres, new light industry (and tertiary ventures) has stimulated the emergence of new urban areas of various

sizes, including small cities and towns across China (Fei, 1989). The number of Chinese cities grew dramatically from 193 in 1979 to 668 in 1999 (Association of Chinese Mayors, 2003). Table 6.1 illustrates the number of cities of different scales.

Table 6.1 The Number of Cities of Different Sizes in 1999

Size of City	Numbers	Population
Extra-large	37	over 1,000,000
Large	48	500,000-1,000,000
Medium	205	200,000-500,000
Small	378	below 200,000

Source: Association of Chinese Mayors, 2003.

Industrialisation has also increased labour absorption in urban areas. From 1979 to 1990, workers in industrial sectors increased from 72.41 million to 121.58 million and employment in tertiary sectors rose from 51.54 million workers to 105.33 million workers, accounting for a remarkable 104.37% increase (National Statistic Bureau (NSB), 1992: 9). In the course of industrialisation, a steady rise in the demand for labour occurred in the towns and cities, but also technical developments in agriculture allowed for a declining rural population. Labour therefore moved rapidly into towns and cities and the urban population grew significantly (Wei, 1985: 28–35). This is clearly shown in the statistics of the Nationwide Census Surveys from 1949 to 2000 (See Table 6.2).

Table 6.2 The Growth of Urban Population in 50 Years

Census	Year	Urban population	Population of whole country	Level of urbanisation (%)
1st	1953	77,260,000	582,600,000	13.26
2nd	1964	127,100,000	694,580,000	18.30
3rd	1982	206,580,000	1,003,940,000	20.60
4th	1990	296,510,000	1,130,480,000	26.23
5th	2000	455,940,000	1,263,330,000	36.09

Source: *Economic Times*, July the 11th, 2001, p. 2.

Unlike the Western process of urbanisation in the nineteenth century, Chinese urbanisation since the 1980s was not completely a natural process initiated by the process of industrialisation and the market economy; it was partly driven by the government (Zhang, 2002b: 475–499). The government's 1984 Urban Reform Policy⁴ clearly placed cities at the heart of the economic development strategy. The government recognised that cities played a key role in rural development by providing free markets for peasants. It also highlighted building stronger linkages between rural and urban places. Moreover, it emphasised that peasants would be allowed to settle in urban areas to engage in industry, business and service trades (Wang, 2001c). Subsequently, the rise of rural migrants directly fed urban growth and generated new economic activity (Zhao and Zhou, 2002: 132–138). According to the statistics, at least 70 million population had abandoned life in their villages to settle in urban areas by the late 1980s (NSB, 1990).

However, market forces and the urban policy of the early 1980s caused inevitable dualism (unbalanced development) between urban and rural areas (Kirkby, 1988). In order to solve the problems arising between rural and urban societies and to control excessive rural populations flowing into big cities, in 1987, the Chinese government committed itself to a strategy: strictly limiting the size of big cities (those with populations of 500,000 or more); developing medium-sized cities (with populations of 200,000 to 500,000); and encouraging the growth of small cities (with populations of 100,000 to 200,000)⁵ (Le, 1999: 195). At the same time, this urban strategy aimed to build industry in the countryside to solve agriculture's surplus labour problems. In this process, some rural areas were transformed into small towns (Fei, 1989; Tan, 1987; Liu, 2002). Consequently, the number of small towns⁶ increased from 2,173 in 1978 to 20,312 in 2000 (Shen, 2005: 52).

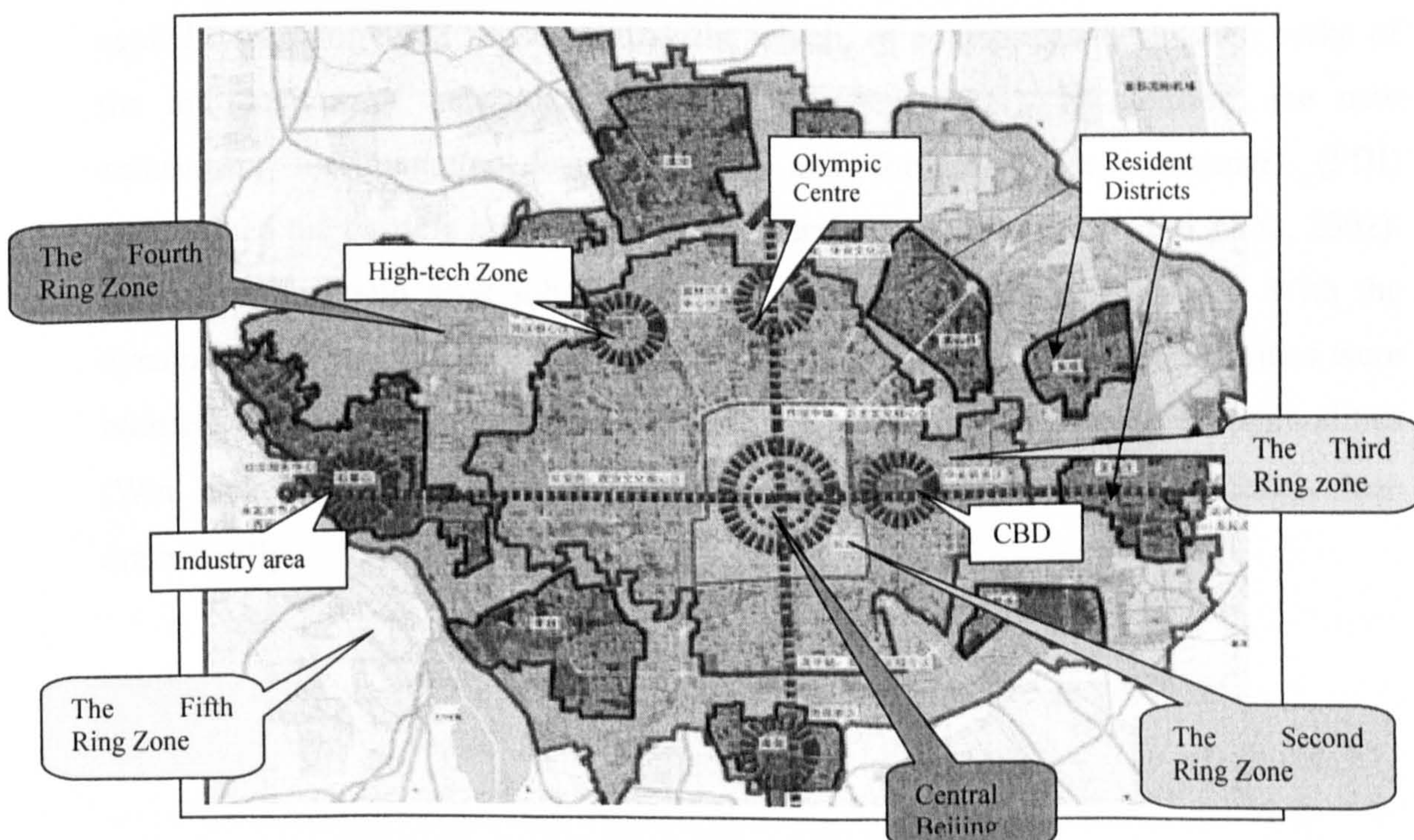
⁴ In October 1984, the reform of the urban industrial and commercial economy was formally initiated with the landmark decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on Reform of the Economic Structure. The overall goal of the urban reform programme has been to create a mixed economy in which the market plays a significant role and in which state planning is concerned more with regulating than with directing the economy.

⁵ It was stipulated up until 1983 that a city, unless other special criteria were satisfied, needed a population of at least 100,000 people to qualify as such. Beginning in 1984, a place with a population of at least 60,000 people would qualify as a city if its annual gross product reached 200 million yuan.

⁶ It was stipulated up until 1983 that a town needed a minimum of 3,000 people with 70% being non-agriculture or minimum of 2,500 people with 85% being non-agricultural. From 1984, a place would be qualified as a town if it had a county government.

In the 1990s, the government altered its focus from developing small towns to large and medium-sized cities. They believed that large and medium-sized cities would be the most advantageous for maximising profit (Guldin, 1992). Therefore the policy of developing big and medium-sized cities has become the main priority of urban policy (NSB, 2003b). It was reported that by 2001 there were 8 cities with populations of over 4,000,000, 17 cities with populations of between 2,000,000 and 4,000,000 and 141 cities with populations of between 1,000,000 and 2,000,000 (NSB, 2003b). The speed of the expansion of urban areas from 1990 to 2000 was dramatic. Beijing was a good example. *People's Daily* reported in 2000 that the 'urbanisation of Beijing has grown by leaps and bounds with its urban area expanding by 20 per cent over the past 10 years' (*People's Daily*, Oct. the 26th, 2000). The urban areas in Beijing expanded from 395.4 square kilometres in 1990 to 490.1 square kilometres in 1999 (Beijing Statistical Bureau (BSB), 2000). Formerly within the confines of the 2nd Ring Road and the 3rd Ring Road, the urban area of Beijing was now expanding to the limits of the recently-constructed 5th Ring Road (see Figure 6.2), with many areas that were formerly farmland now being developed into residential neighbourhoods or commercial areas.

Figure 6.2 The Development of Urban Areas in Beijing



Note: CBD = Central Business District
Source: City Plan Centre in Beijing, 2004.

The evidence above showed that the new pattern of Chinese urbanisation on the one hand was driven by economic forces, which created new urban areas, released rural labour and caused the large-scale inflow of rural migrants to towns and cities; on the other hand it was controlled and planned by the government policy. Nevertheless, once urbanisation happened, it had an unprecedented impact upon Chinese society and on people's lives.

6.2.2 Urbanisation and its Impacts on People's Lives

Urbanisation in China not only caused a rapid growth in the urban population and the size and scale of cities, but it also created changes in the economic, political and cultural functions of a city (Le, 1999). These changes affected, and were reflected in, people's urban life.

Firstly, Chinese cities became economically autonomous from the Central Government and became embedded in their immediate locale (Davis, 1995: 2). In order to stimulate productivity and satisfy the demand for more commodities in the cities, the CCP decentralised much of its decision-making and financial power, and initiated global economic involvement. The country now allowed the entry of foreign capital, technology and managerial skills, which, of course, carried in their wake of the introduction of new ideas and values (Zhou, 2004). In addition, the new enthusiasm for markets, decentralisation and foreign direct investment (FDI) undermined the barriers between urban and rural populations (Zhao and Zhou, 2002). Urban people could seek jobs in different regions by their own efforts. With the dynamics of social mobility and market orientation, urban commercial activities were boosted. Goods, housing, social services and recreation had become commodities (Wei and Wang, 1997). Urban people's income and consumption levels rose dramatically.

Table 6.3 Urban Consumerism by Year

	1978	1985	1997
Income and consumption (urban)			
Indices (*a)			
Disposable income per capita	100	160	312
Retail sales	100	239	2,031
Per capita living space (sq. metres)	3.6	5.2	8.8
Natural gas use (piped and bottled) (%)	14	22	76
Consumer durables per 100 households (*b)			
Washing machines	6	48	89
Refrigerators	0	7	76
Sofas	89	132	205
Soft beds	..	6	42
TV, black and white	32	67	26(*d)
TV, colour	..	17	100
Media and communication (national)			
TV broadcast coverage (% population)	88
Radio broadcast coverage (% population)	86
Copies publishes (in millions) (*c)			
Newspapers	140	200	187
Books	46	67	73
Magazines	11	26	24
Urban telephones (in 100,000s)	28	48	554(*d)
Long-distance telephone lines (in 1,000s)	19	38	1,146
Mobile telephone (in 1,000s)	0	0	1,323

Notes: (*a) For indices, 1978 = 100, and subsequent increases are adjusted for inflation.

(*b) Consumer durable statistics began in 1980 or 1981.

(*c) Publication statistics began in 1980.

(*d) 1996 data. (. .) = not available.

Source: NSB (1998a, pp. 24-5, 128, 324, 327, 568, 754; 1998b, p. 128; 1997, p. 537; 1996, p. 99. 26, 533).

Secondly, urbanisation has also rationalised the individual's own interests and created a relatively free climate for Chinese people to control their own lives (Zhang, 1996). Under the process of urbanisation, the market social contract, instead of being a purely socialist social contract, plays a more important role in influencing Chinese people's lives and values (Tang and Parish, 2000). Under the central planned system, the socialist social contract promised an egalitarian, redistributionist order that provided job security, basic living standards and special opportunities for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In return, the state demanded sacrifices in current

consumption, a levelling of individual aspirations and obedience to all-knowing party redistributions. Conversely, in return for abandoning the idea of communal egalitarianism, job security and other benefits, the market contract promised that giving free rein to individual aspirations produced better jobs and greater consumption (Tang and Parish, 2000). In addition, compared to the Maoist era, the political bureaucracy and work-unit system intervened less in urban people's daily lives (Zhang, 1987: 7–10). People's production activities were no longer related to their political credits but purely associated with their salaries in work units (Li and Li, 2000). Their social status depended on their personal capabilities, not their class labels. Marriage and divorce were regarded as personal affairs without political intervention. Urban people had more access to communication and ideas through the mass media and the Internet were able to express their own opinions on public affairs. Voluntary organisations have emerged in cities. These changes are evidence of the decline of political control over Chinese people's lives.

Thirdly, urbanisation has accelerated the transformation of China from traditional tenets to modern principles and concepts about life. The most noticeable phenomenon is that the totalitarian urban culture in Maoist era has been replaced by a multicultural environment in the cities. Western values, Confucianism and the Communist doctrine exist side by side. Citizens can choose their own religions and beliefs. Under these circumstances, individualism is expressed in the fields of arts, literature and people's lifestyle such as dress, discourses and leisure activities. Collectivism, by contrast, plays a diminishing role in people's daily lives (Sun, 2003). Meanwhile, the Chinese society itself has undergone a startling transformation, as diversity, consumerism, enhanced personal autonomy and cultural creativity have begun to appear with growing force (Li, 1996). These changes have influenced Chinese people's attitudes and behaviours in their work, family, marriage and in the public sphere. As an interviewee stated:

The idea that 'sacrificed individuals benefit others' (*shejiweiren*) is no longer applicable to today's society; 'take advantage of each other; benefit from each other' (*huhui huili*) has become a new principle of people's lives.

(Interviewee No. 7, 2003)

In summary, the urbanisation that has resulted from economic reform has been a combination of social transformation fuelled by the market economy and the commitment of the Chinese government to embrace social development. This process has transformed some rural places into urban areas. It has also stimulated the spatial and population expansion of cities. More importantly, it has brought China a 'way of urban life' (Wirth, 1938) through transforming people's lives into new patterns. For example, the new focus on consumption, the new relationship between work (public) and leisure (privacy), the new concerns about healthy life, a greater demand for individual rights and a variety of norms and codes of behaviour rather than a general consensus have changed the ways in which people think and act.

Women's sport as a social phenomenon and cultural practice has been extensively and intensively affected by urbanisation. Urbanisation has influenced the development of women's sport in two major ways: firstly urbanisation has stimulated the institutional reconstruction of the sport system with the reform of sports strategy, policy, administrative structure and functions. This is a top-down process on the part of the state, aiming to satisfy the increasing economic and social demands of women's mass sport. Secondly, urbanisation has launched the socio-cultural rebuilding of sport with changes in sports infrastructures, participation models and sports values. It is a bottom-up process driven by the complex demands of women at the grassroots. In the following sections, there will be a discussion of how urbanisation, from top-down and bottom-up, has transformed the dimensions of women's sport in urban areas.

6.3 Policy: Urbanisation and the Promotion of Women's Mass Sport

Sport is a necessary component of civic life (Ferguson, 1767). It was originally a cultural practice (Coakley, 2001) in relation to individuals' natural demands as well as social requirements (Loy, 1979). Coakley (2001) suggests that sport has had different forms and meanings from one place to another and has changed over time. It has historical and social constructions, which, in the other words, 'are activities to give human beings form and meaning as they live their lives with one another' (p. 3). Since the 1980s, when Chinese society underwent a great social transformation, Chinese sport has been altering its political aims and becoming increasingly involved in the

changes in cultural and social practice in cities.

6.3.1 Change of Sports Policy

Reviewing the history of Chinese sport since 1949, sport and politics have always been intertwined. This ideology was highlighted again by the Olympic Strategy in 1985, which clearly advocated that 'elite sport was the priority' (Wu, 1999: 288). Mass sports participation as a sports ideal was therefore superseded. However, this situation has been changing along with the process of urbanisation since the late 1980s.

As urbanisation has launched an economic revolution in people's lives, it has triggered a socio-political debate on how to redefine the relationship between sport, the state and the individual. The changes in the roles of the state and market and their impact upon individuals constitute new concerns of how to live a better life for individuals. The political function of Chinese sport has accordingly been required to change. In the late 1980s, the book *Qiangguo Meng* [Superpower Dream] (Zhao, 1988) initiated a furious argument over the dialectic relations between mass sport and elite sport and questioned the Olympic Strategy. Zhao argued that:

Olympic gold medals deprived most Chinese people of the opportunities to participate in sport for good health.

(Quote in Wu, 1999: 352)

It was the first time that research had stressed the importance of human beings in sport rather than the sport itself. Thus, alongside the vigorous economic and social reform, Chinese sports policy was encouraged to undergo a substantial change. The key objective was to encourage the Chinese sports system to become involved in the market-oriented transformation and to improve the quality of people's lives (Wu, 1995 and CGSA, 1998).

The Central Government redefined the functions of sport. The No.8 Document entitled 'The Suggestions of the Central Committee of the CCP and the Government on How to Strengthen and Improve Sport in the New Era', issued by the State Council

in 2002, stated:

1. Sport is a symbol of the economic and social development of a country. Its function is to satisfy people's material and cultural needs.
2. Sport as a mass participatory activity can not only strengthen people's health but also inculcate Chinese people with the spirit of bravery, competition, cooperation and justice. High-level sports competitions can also promote nationalism, patriotism and collectivism.
3. Sport is a bridge of social communication. It can improve the relationships of members of society; construct a healthy way to live and create a harmonious environment in society. In addition, sport is also an avenue for the development of international relationships with other countries.
4. Sport is a new economic force. The rise of the sports industry has become more important in the market economy in China.

The statement reflects the increased attention that the Chinese central government has been paying to the social and economic functions of sport apart from its political function. Consequently, the 'one-leg' sports policy, which largely emphasised elite sport, has been changed into a 'two-legs' policy⁷. Mass sport has been strongly promoted. Wu Shaozhu, the previous Director General of the Sports Ministry announced in 1994:

A nation rich in gold medals does not always mean that it is a sports super-power in the world. What's more important is to make the public more sports-conscious and get more people to take an active part in various kinds of fitness exercises. To this end, it is necessary for the whole of society to invest more money in improving mass sport. Only when a well-coordinated development of both mass sports and elite sport is achieved will China truly become a sports superpower – like an eagle with two powerful wings that will enable it to soar high into the sky.

- Wu Shaozhu's Speech in Sports Directors' Conference,
April the 6th, 1994, cited from Wu, 1995.

⁷ Developing elite sport at the same time as promoting sports participation at the grassroots

The policy of promoting mass sport was fundamentally based on the social and individual requirement to improve health and fitness. The Chinese government realised that health not only benefited private but also public purposes. They suggested that people's physique symbolised the development and modernisation of a nation (Li, 1995b: 22). In addition, promoting sports participation could lead Chinese people to a healthier lifestyle. A healthier workforce could also mean a more productive workforce with less time lost through illness and a happier workforce less prone to the debilitating effect of stress (Li, 1995a: 32–38). In June 1995 the State Council of the PRC and the Chinese Olympic Committee (COC) established the 'National Fitness Programme' (NFP thereafter).

The NFP aimed to 'promote mass sports activities on an extensive scale, improve the people's physique, and spur the socialist modernisation of China' (State Council and COC, 1995). Its goals were:

By the end of the 20th century, to preliminarily establish a national fitness management system along with the market economy; to enhance sports participation at the grassroots extensively and intensively; and to create a socialised, scientific, industrialised and legally-based national fitness system (State Council and COC, 1995).

The NFP was targeted on the whole nation, with emphasis on youth and children. It also highlighted the importance of sports participation among workers, peasants, soldiers, minorities, women, the disabled, senior citizens and intellectuals.

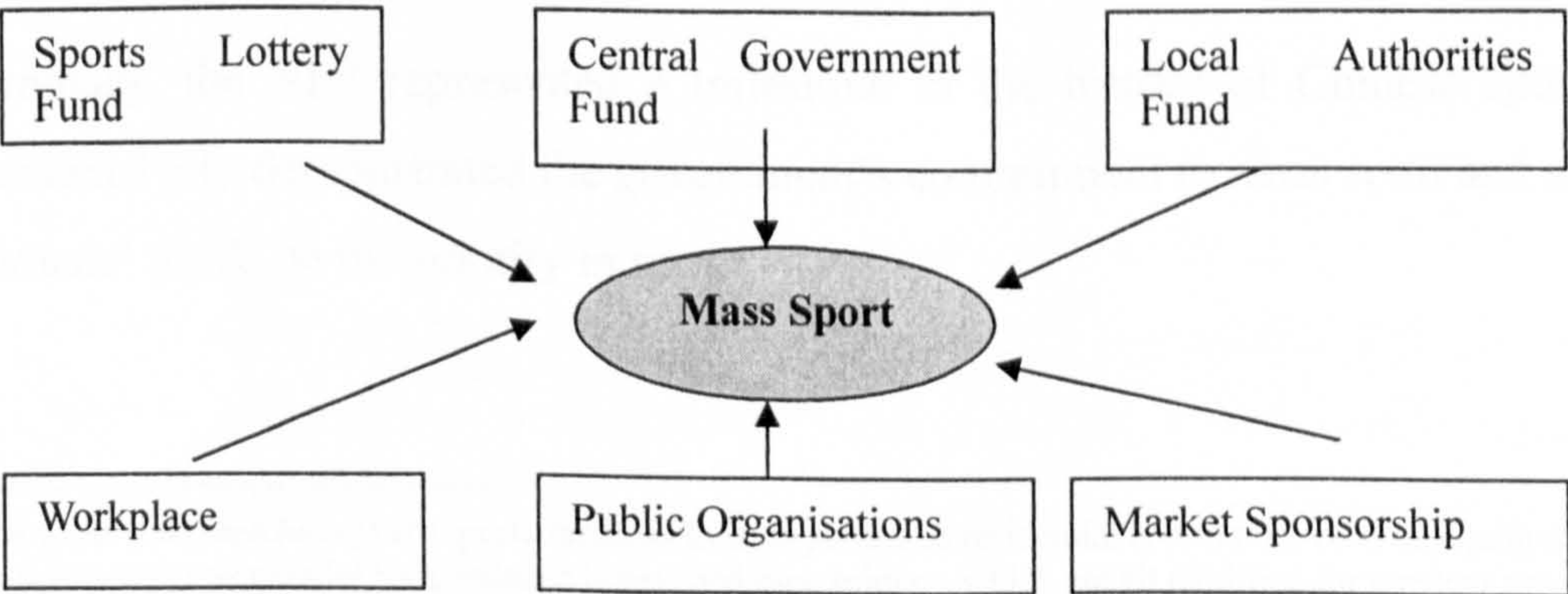
To achieve these goals, firstly the NFP stipulated that central and local governments should work together to promote people's sports and fitness consciousness. Secondly, it required sports legal systems to be set up and put into operation in such areas as social sports supervision and guidance, mass sport participation and the organisation and management of sporting facilities. Thirdly, it required the organising and managing of sports events to be shared among people. Prominence was given to mass participation, health-oriented and fun-making features. Fourthly, a fitness testing system was introduced. This system focused on testing the physique and health conditions of urban people nationwide. The national physique survey was required to be held every five years. Fifthly, it emphasised the construction of sports grounds and

facilities and regulated that all state-owned sports grounds and facilities should be open to the public (State Council and COC, 1995).

However the government observed that the NFP would not be fully implemented due to limited funding (Yang, 2004). To solve this problem, it decided to utilise resources within the society (NSC, 1997). The sports lottery, established in 1994, was important for raising funds for sporting and recreational events and for maintaining sports facilities: 60% of the lottery's revenues were used for public projects including sports meeting and fitness programs. In the ten years from 1994 to 2003, 24.8 billion RMB (3.1 billion US\$) has been raised from the sports lottery. In total, 9.2 billion RMB (1,150 million US\$) was used for the NFP; 6.1 billion RMB (762.5 million US\$) was used for elite sport; 9.5 billion RMB (1,187.5 million US\$) was used for youth sport, sport for disabled people and hosting the Olympic Games in 2008 (*Sports Daily*, Nov. the 3rd, 2004).

Besides the sports lottery fund, sports authorities at local levels were required to allocate their funds in a better way to increase expenditure on mass sport (CGAS, 2000). Enterprises, government-financed institutions, public organisations and individuals were encouraged to give financial support to sports and fitness activities. The government also aimed to develop the sports industry and to explore the sports market in categories such as fitness, rehabilitation and recreation to stimulate people's sports consumption (State Council and COC, 1995). By taking these measures, it intended to build a network for funding and supporting sports programmes (see Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3 Funding Network for Mass Sport



The fund for mass sport would facilitate the development of fitness projects, building sports facilities, training fitness instructors and holding sports events and finance the conducting of the fitness surveys. By the end of 2000, the China General Administration of Sport (CGAS) had carried out 1,182 fitness projects and built 2,200 fitness paths.⁸ Local authorities had built 30,000 fitness paths. There were over 200,000 fitness instructors in the country. In 1997 and 2000, the CGAS had two fitness tests and surveys nationwide. There were 436 fitness test centres in cities (Yang, 2005).

Besides supplying sports facilities, instruction, events and fitness tests, the NFP also inaugurated the '1-2-1 Programme' to encourage social members, families, communities and schools to engage in fitness activities. It provided a guideline for promoting mass sport and achieving the goal of 'sport for all'.

- 1) it encouraged people to participate in *one* sport or fitness exercise each day; to know at least *two* fitness exercises; and to go to a fitness testing centre *once* a year.
- 2) it urged each family to have *one* fitness equipment; to play sports outdoors *twice* in each season; and to read *one* sports magazine or paper.
- 3) it stressed each community should provide *one* fitness place and organise fitness activities among residents *twice* a year; it also required *one* team of fitness instructors.
- 4) it recommended that each school should give students *one* hour to take part in sport each day; to organise students to hike *twice* a year and to test the fitness of students *once* a year.

(NFP, 1995)

In summary, the NFP represented a milestone in the history of Chinese sport. It comprehensively demonstrated the government's commitment to mass sport and made individuals' needs be the priority in sport.

⁸ Fitness paths (*jianzhen lujing*) are sports facilities built in parks and residential community centres, equipped with such apparatus as parallel bars, balance beams and rope bridges, which are all modified for amateur practice. Building fitness paths in residential districts is a very important programme both in the NFP and the urban development plan.

6.3.2 The Promotion of Women's Mass Sport

The NFP has profoundly influenced Chinese women's sports participation. Instead of focusing on training a small number of elite female athletes to compete on the world stage for national glory, the new sport policy embraced and supported a massive number of women at the grassroots to participate in sport as a creative, expressive and meaningful avenue for women's self-development. The goal of the NFP – 'sport for all' – implied non-discrimination, no elitism and provided popular alternatives to mainstream sport. It was ideal for introducing the idea of equality in opportunities for women (Hargreaves, 1994: 237). The NFP identified women as a category of special need. It noted that attention must be paid to women's health, fitness and well-being. It created a new dimension in women's sport and played a leading role in the development of policies and practices in the post-Mao era. In general, it had three kinds of influences on women's sport.

Firstly, the formulation and implementation of the NFP embodied the efforts of the Chinese government to safeguard women's equal rights to participate in sport. Its objective was closely associated with the expansion of the concept of health and the idea of enriching women's cultural lives. The government pointed out:

For women, physical activity makes an important contribution to physical and mental well-being. Chinese women as important social contributors should be widely encouraged to participate in sport, which is also a symbol of social progress. However, constrained by social factors and traditional concepts, women's sports activities are still at a low level at the grassroots. How to involve women in sports activities and physical exercises is the key to accomplishing the goal of 'sports for all'.

(cited in Ma, 1999: 296)

Secondly, besides introducing legislation guaranteeing mass sports participation among women, the government also created a network of opportunities to guarantee women access to sports participation. According to the NFP, women's sports activities should be promoted by central government and operated by local sports authorities, enterprises, voluntary and commercial agencies. It required local

authorities to develop sports stadiums, fields and other sports facilities accessible to women. It obliged enterprises, communities and sports associations to organise women's fitness training and sports events. Sports agencies were required to carry out fitness testing and surveys among women. The sports instruction system was directed to supervise women's sports participation (State Council and COC, 1995). The CGAS also claimed that for provision to be appropriate for women there should be ease of accessibility by public transport, proximity to residential areas should be a guiding principle, and there should be good safety measures, a pleasant social space and a friendly atmosphere (ACWF and CGAS, 2000).

Thirdly, in order to effectively promote women's sports activities at the grassroots and to support the NFP, in March 2000 the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) and CGAS launched a nationwide campaign under the slogan 'A hundred million women participating in fitness activities' [*Yi wan funv jianshen huodong*] (ACWF and CGAS, 2000). This programme aimed to promote a scientific, civilised and healthy lifestyle to women through their participation in sport. It firstly proposed various sports and fitness activities suitable for women, for example, organising family sports events including recreational sports activities and fitness exercises (see Appendix E, Photo 5). Secondly, it required local governments to build women's sports centres and explore specific exercise venues. Thirdly, it emphasised women's leadership in sport at the grassroots so that women's sport could develop continuously and comprehensively for women's own benefit. Fourthly, it used the mass media and created female fitness models to induce more women to take part in sport. This movement highlighted the importance of women's physical activities in urban society and explicitly formulated a new method of promoting urban women's sport.

It was reported in 2004 that in cities, 27.15% of women engaged in sports activities. Among them, 7.1% took part in sports and exercise once or twice a week for 30 minutes or more per session, 10.07% participated in sport at least three times a week and 30 minutes per session (IRCMS II, 2004).

In summary, urbanisation has led China's sport into a market-oriented transformation. A 'two-leg' sports policy has been established. Its aim was not only to pay more attention to the social and economic functions of sport, but also to advance the individual's interest in and benefit from sport. The NFP demonstrated the

government's commitment to mass sport and also met the mass aspiration of sports participation. Women's sport was profoundly influenced by the NFP. The NFP not only safeguarded the rights of women to participate in sports, but also regulated the methods of implementation for women's sport at the grassroots. It introduced a new approach to women's sport in the urbanisation era.

The growth of women's sport at the grassroots was not only the consequence of the sports policy, but also the direct result of urbanisation and the changes in women's urban life. To a certain extent, the forces from the bottom up were far more powerful than the top-down sports policy in promoting women's sports participation. As Chinese cities underwent a process of urbanisation, they were playing active roles in the transformation of women's sport. Cities were organic entities comprised of spatial dimensions, communication and transportation networks, governments and laws, voluntary organisations, social classes, ethnic groups, public behaviours and value systems (Riess, 1989: 1). To understand the relationship between urbanisation and Chinese women's participation in sport over the past two decades, we need to acknowledge the specific changes which occurred in the urban way of life – value systems, institutional structures and physical structures⁹ and their impacts on female sports activities.

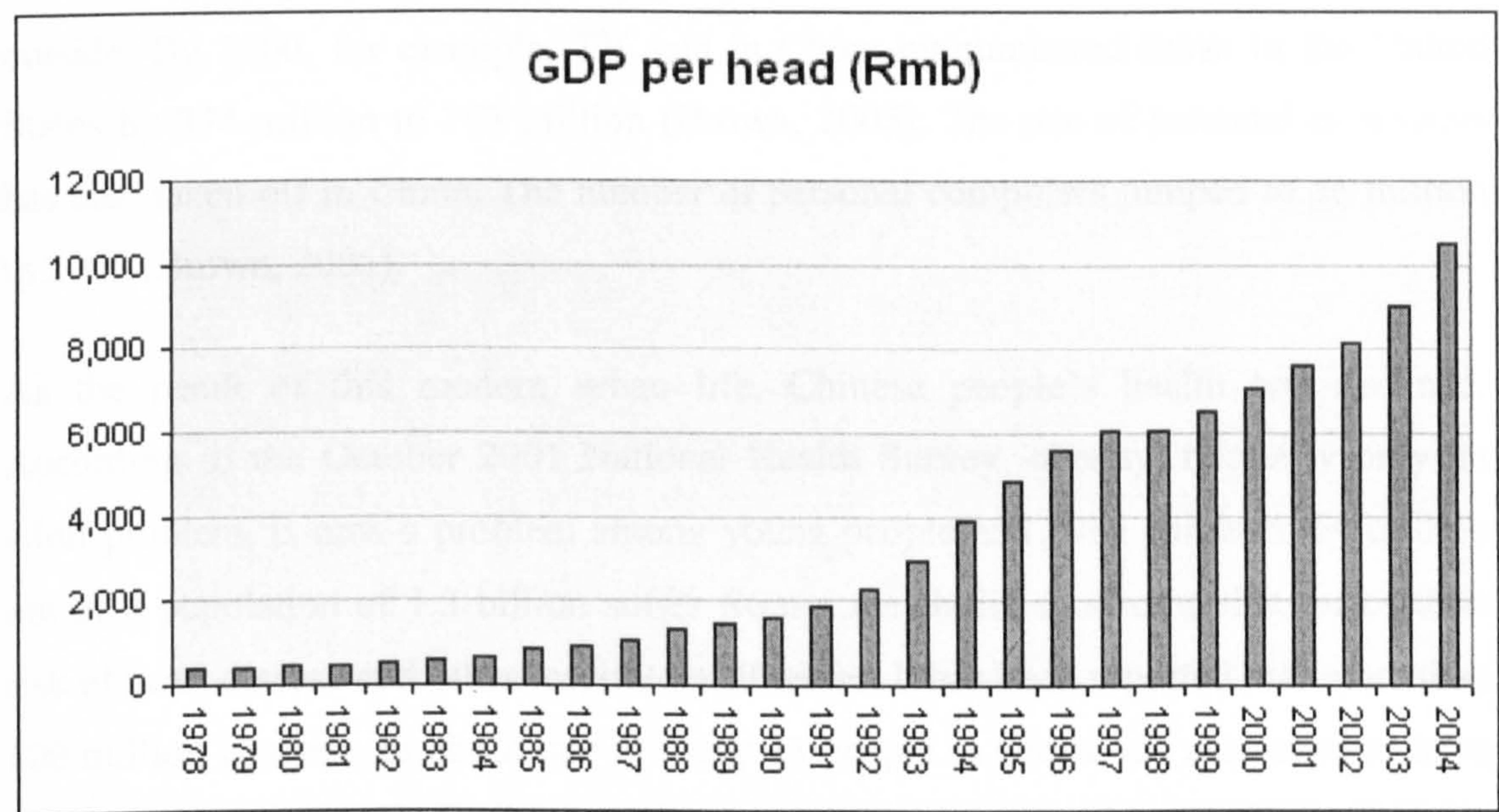
6.4 Concepts: Changes in Urban Life and Women's Demands for Sports Activity

Since the 1980s, the Chinese economy has been increasing dramatically. From 1979 to 2005, it grew by a blistering 9.4% annual average, making it the fourth largest economy in the world (*New York Times*, January the 25th, 2006). As shown in Figure 6.4, within 25 years from 1979 to 2004, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita rose from RMB 379 (US\$ 75.8) to 10,502 (US\$ 1,312.8)¹⁰ (NSB, 2004).

⁹ The city's physical structure consists of space, demographics, economy and technology, while social organisation comprises class, ethnic and radical groups, social institutions and legal and political institutions. The value system encompasses individual and group attitudes, ideology and behaviour. (Riess, 1989)

¹⁰ The Exchange Rate 1US\$ = RMB 5 in 1979; 1US\$ = RMB 8 in 2004.

Figure 6.4 GDP per Head by Year 1978–2004



Source: NSB, 2004.

The economic achievement increased Chinese people’s living standards and changed individual lifestyles from a generalised, static and monotonous pattern into dynamic, various and diversified opportunities. This resulted in a great change in the Chinese people’s attitudes towards sporting life. The most significant changes have taken place in people’s attitudes to health, leisure and consumption in relation to sport. An exploration of these changes should lead to a full understanding of the driving forces behind the transformation of Chinese women’s sport since the 1980s.

6.4.1 The Expanding Concept of Health and Women’s Sport

Along with the rise of the urban economy, the Chinese people’s material life has increased dramatically. Economic modernisation in China on the one hand has made urban life richer and more convenient, while on the other hand systematically eliminating a healthy way of life. For example, Western fast food has been introduced to urban people’s dinner tables and convenient public transportation such as the metro, bus and the increasing number of private cars in cities has reduced the necessity for walking and riding bicycles. According to the statistics, the sale of private cars in China has grown at an annual average rate of 37.9% since 1999 (NSB, 2003a). The

spread and availability of mass media, films, magazines, televisions and the Internet has encouraged people to stay at home and left no time for doing physical exercises outside. By 2000, for example, TV sets in China outnumbered those in the United States by 374 million to 243 million (Brown, 2005). The use of personal computers has also taken off in China. The number of personal computers jumped to 36 million in 2003 (Brown, 2005).

As the result of this modern urban life, Chinese people's health has declined. According to the October 2001 National Health Survey, obesity, normally only an adult problem, is now a problem among young people and even children: 64 million out of a population of 1.3 billion suffer from a metabolic syndrome that raises their risk of heart disease and other respiratory illnesses. It has been reported that more than 100 million Chinese, or about one in every 13 people in China, are estimated to have high blood pressure, a leading cause of heart and brain problems (*Xinhua News*, September the 30th, 2002). These illnesses – what the Chinese people call the 'wealthy illness' (*Fugui Bing*), has made the country more aware of the importance of health (Xiong, 2000).

According to an ancient Chinese saying, a healthy body through exercise was the origin of a good life. This perspective is so pervasive among women that it has become the main force motivating them to participate in sports activities. According to a survey in 1998, over 85% of women participated in sport for health reasons (Ma, 1999) (See Figure 6.9). These statistics are confirmed by women's own statements. One interviewee indicated that:

Nowadays, everything is getting better. We do not worry about starving and malnutrition. We can eat meat everyday; we can buy anything we need in the market; and we can go travelling around the country and the world if we have enough money. Life is so beautiful and pleasant. We should enjoy it. However, so many illnesses which we seldom heard about in the past, such as heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure, are threatening our life. For example, I suffered from diabetes so that I could not eat anything sweet. I missed so many delicious foods and also had to take tablets regularly. Now I exercise *Taiji* everyday, which helps me to deal with those problems. Health is so important in our lives and physical exercise is a crucial way to achieve it.

(Interviewee No. 23, 2003)

Another interviewee said:

Participating in sports activities is good for our eyes, necks, legs and waist and protects us from disease. After all, we only have one body. We have to take care of it.

(Interviewee No. 28, 2004)

This point of view was supplemented by another woman's statement:

I have been aware that money, honours and social status could not belong to me forever; only a healthy body belongs to me. I should utilise leisure time to build up a healthy body rather than pursuing those imaginary fames. Otherwise, I would regret when I am getting older.

(Interviewee No. 24, 2003)

Based on the research, most interviewees have been aware of the importance of health and they had strong demands for participation in sports activities. In addition, along with urbanisation, the meaning of women's health has changed. The Maoist concept of health highlighted physical fitness and strength, which was demanded by the state for economic production and population reproduction. In the post-Mao era, the concept of health has become multi-dimensional. It includes bodily health, spiritual health and a healthy lifestyle. These three elements actually originate from traditional Chinese philosophy, which was based on Confucianism and Taoism (Xiong, 2005). In the Maoist era, they were ignored and even criticised as feudal elements. Since the reforms, this traditional perspective on health has been rediscovered to meet people's requirements for creating a better life. Based on the interviews, many Chinese women's concerns about sports activities are not only for bodily health but also for mental health.

Modern life on the one hand brings improved standards of living for women; on the other hand it has caused many Chinese women to suffer from depression, agony and mental disorder caused by heavy pressures from work, study and family. Recent studies suggest that Chinese women's psychological problems and mental health were the most important concern (Dawn, 2005). *China News* on November the 27th, 2002 reported that 23 Chinese people out of 100,000 committed suicide each year because of psychological problems; and the suicide rate for women was 25% higher than for

men. China was the one country in the world where the rate of women's suicide was higher than that of men's. To relieve pressure and maintain a peaceful life has therefore become one of the most urgent needs for Chinese women in their urban lives. Participating in physical exercise is considered by Chinese women as a good way of dealing with the social pressure. An interviewee stated:

I felt very tired because of the pressure from my work. I thought I should find a way to release the pressure. Taking some exercise could make me forget unhappiness and ease depression. To be honest, in modern society, unless you can balance your stability and mobility physically and mentally, you cannot have a healthy life.

(Interviewee No. 6, 2003)

Another interviewee commented:

In my opinion, to know how to enjoy life through sport is very important to urban women, because we are getting increasing pressures from the rapid pace of urban life.

(Interviewee No. 4, 2004)

To reduce the pressures of urban life, Chinese women were more concerned with taking part in recreational and therapy exercises rather than fierce and aggressive physical activities. Walking, yoga, *Taiji* and dance were the most popular activities among women according to their needs for mental health. For example, a *Taiji* participant explained why she chose *Taiji* as daily exercise:

Taiji is different from other sports exercises. It is a systematic training of human beings to be healthy from your body to brain and to your dispositions. As the pace of the urban world goes faster and faster, only *Taiji* makes me feel calm, which I believe is the key to being healthy in the modern world.

(Interviewee No. 25, 2003)

Since urban development, keeping healthy has become an important topic of discussion among urban women. It is reflected in the mushrooming columns on health issues in women's magazines, on TV programmes and on the Internet. The media cover a wide range of issues concerning women's health and fitness – from how to keep healthy teeth to how to live a healthy sexual life. Underlying these topics is a general concern about the need to take part in sport and exercise. The proliferation of

writings and media images on sport has made a great impact on women's knowledge and interest. Sport, therefore, is conceptualised as an important element for creating a healthy lifestyle and has become absorbed into Chinese women's own experiences. An interviewee stated:

I push myself to come to the park every morning. If I do not come, I would have slept until noon. Then I would not go to sleep until midnight. In the past, I suffered from insomnia and felt very weak. It was a vicious circle. Since I do some exercises, my life has been totally changed. Now I get up earlier and go to bed earlier. Doing exercises makes me very active. My insomnia has gone. I feel my life is enriched.

(Interviewee No. 29, 2004)

The concept of health consists of multiple elements including fitness, pleasure and well-being. Many urban women expect more opportunities to participate in sport.

6.4.2 Increasing Leisure Time and Women's Sport

In the Maoist era, people's private time and space was tightly controlled by the political orientation of the state (Wang, 1995). People's leisure time was regulated. After 1980, the depoliticisation of the workplace and deregulation of economic life created new conditions (Davis, 1995: 3). Thus, compulsory or semi-compulsory political activities for workers were reduced, shortening working hours. In the 1990s, working days decreased from six to five days a week. In the year 2000, public holidays per year increased to 114 days including weekends. Furthermore, thanks to the proliferation of various timesaving machines; the increase in commodity supply and the rise of the service sectors, people's time spent on housework had dramatically declined (Zhang, 1987). As a result, the total amount of people's leisure time increased. For example, Table 6.4 shows the change in Beijing urbanites' daily life between 1986 and 1996. Table 6.5 shows the dramatic increase in Chinese people's leisure time in the last two decades.

**Table 6.4 Comparison of Time Allocation in Beijing Urbanites' Daily Life
(1986 and 1996)**

(In minutes)

	Work & study time	Sleeping & eating time	Housework time	Free time
<i>1986</i>	467	586	148	239
<i>1996</i>	390	636	111	303

Source: Beijing Statistic Bureau (BSB), 1986; Research Team of Time Allocation in daily life, 1996.

Table 6.5 Increase in Urbanites' Leisure times 1980–2001

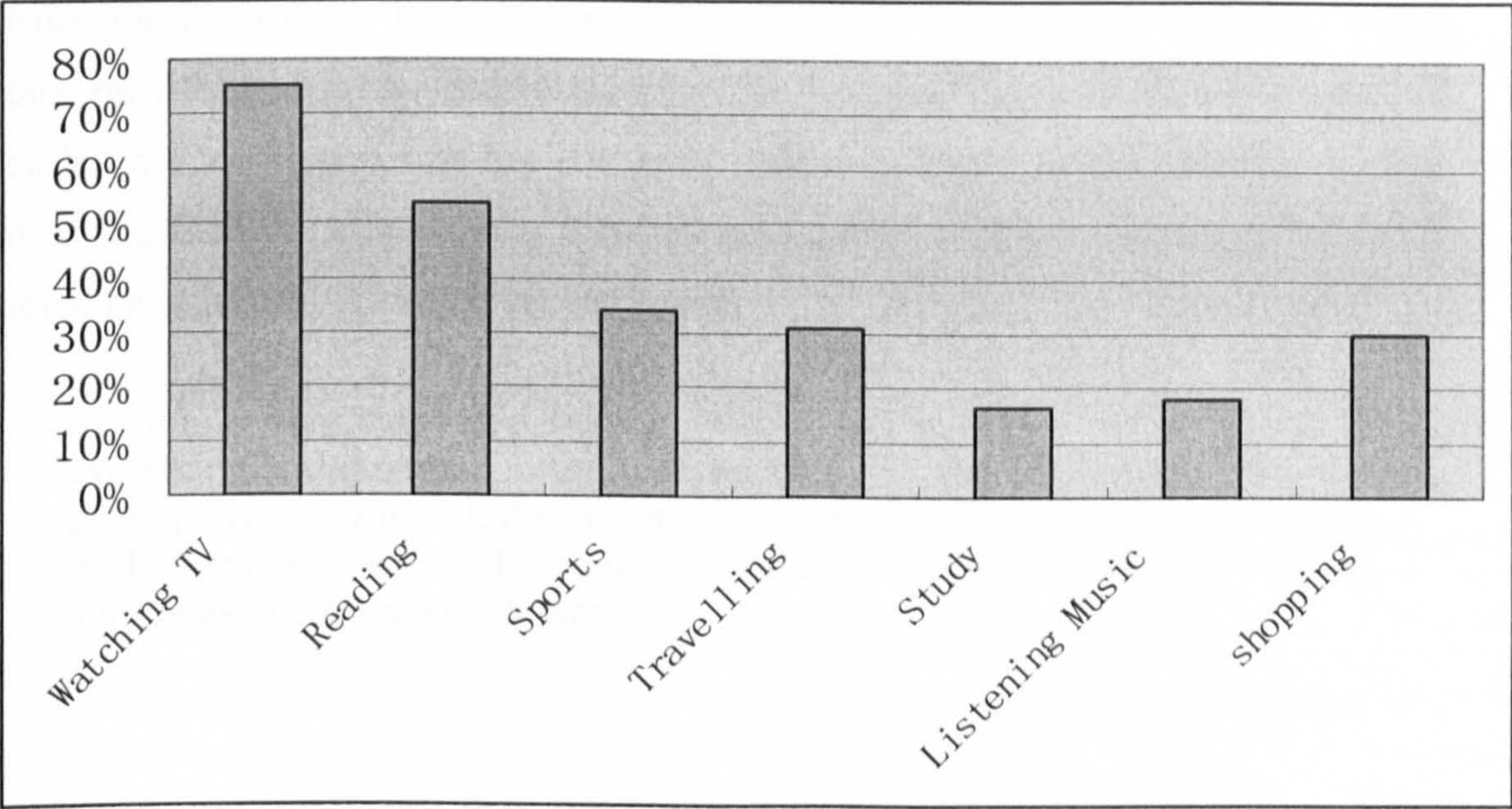
(In hours and minutes)

<i>Year</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>1986</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>2001</i>
Leisure time/ day	2.21	3.59	4.48	5.03	5.44

Source: Wang Yalin and Li Jinrong, 1982; Qing Nianbing, 1990; CSB, 1992; Zhang and Ma, 2004.

With regard to Chinese women, the shrinking of the family structure and the one-child policy in the cities were also factors that contributed to the increase of women's leisure times (Croll et al., 1985). With the increase in leisure time, Chinese women began to think of how to arrange various activities for their own interests. Figure 6.5 shows Chinese women's favourite leisure-time activities.

Figure 6.5 Activities in Urban Women's Leisure Time



Note: Sample: 500 in big cities; 300 in medium cities; and 200 in small cities
Source: Ma, 1999.

Since sport has become an integral part of the commercialisation of popular culture: together with cinema, travel, shopping and eating out, they are part of the mass entertainment industry, closely linked to the mechanisms of the market. The commercialisation of sport has stimulated new needs and expectations, so that sport has become firmly established as dramatic entertainment. It is an important new leisure activity for Chinese women. As an interviewee indicated:

Traditional women's leisure activities such as watching TV, reading novels, playing *Majiang* (a traditional gambling game) are all physically static activities, which cannot completely suit women's modern life. Sports activities represent vivid, dynamic and changeable elements, which are new pursuits of Chinese women.

(Interviewee No. 4, 2004)

According to the statistics, the average time for urban women's participation in sport rose from 8 minutes per day to 13 minutes between 1986 and 1996 (Research Team of Time Consumption in Daily Life, 1999).

There were four reasons that could explain the popularity of sports activities in

women's leisure time. Firstly, as discussed earlier, sports activities contributed to bodily and mental health; secondly, it might help women to keep a good physical shape; thirdly, women tended to participate in sport with friends or family, which could provide them with a good atmosphere for social communication and networking; last but not least, sport was fun – it could release women from the pressure of their work and family. Once women involved themselves in sport, their different needs would be satisfied. As an interviewee stated:

My job is very static and boring. When I am at home on the weekend, everything is the same. I want to change my dull life. Of course, I can not give up my job, after all, it offers me good pay. But in my spare time, I want to do something active. I join the fitness club and spend time there. I feel very relaxed after physical exercises.

(Interviewee No. 6, 2003)

Another interviewee said:

I feel much younger, healthier and more active when participating in sport in my spare time.

(Interviewee No. 23, 2003)

The increase in leisure time has been considered essential for human development (Marx, 1968: 219). It is in leisure rather than work that individuals see themselves as free to act and develop as they please. Rich leisure activities symbolise the improvement of the quality of Chinese urban life and women's pursuit of sports activities has simulated a dynamic and diverse improvement in urban women's leisure lives. As an interviewee stated:

Women's life is always controlled by the others – employers, husbands and children. It is only when we leave home and participate in sport and exercises with other women that we can fully control our time and enjoy our lives.

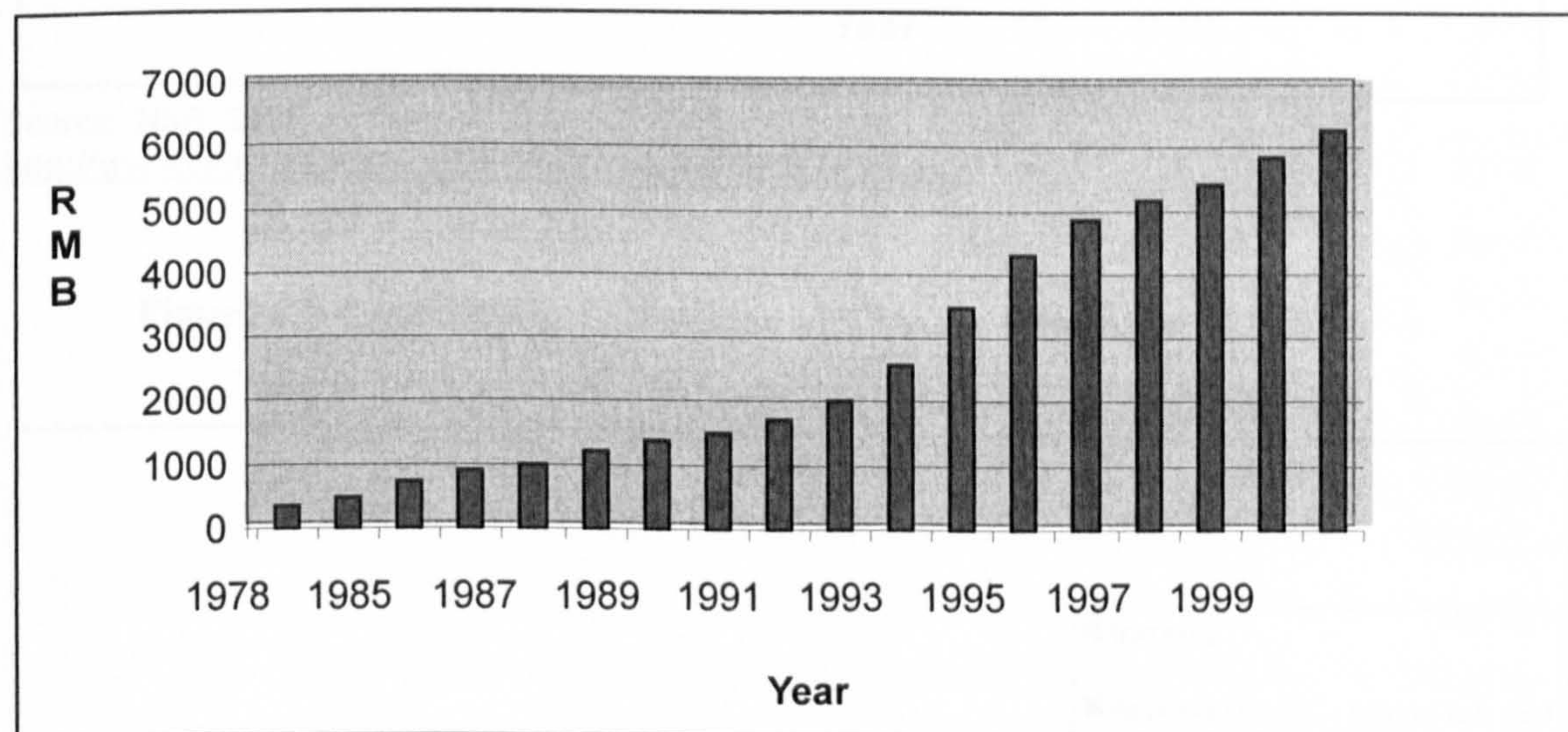
(Interviewee No. 11, 2003)

For urban women, sports activities could fulfill their desires for controlling themselves by controlling their leisure time.

6.4.3 Pervasive Consumption Activities and Women's Sport

Since China undertook economic reform, Chinese urban society has launched a 'consumer revolution' (Davis, 2000). The first aspect of this is that the incomes of urban residents have rapidly increased. As Figure 6.6 shows, people's per capita income doubled between 1978 and 1990, and increased another 50% between 1990 and 1994¹¹ (NSB, 1995: 257). From 1995 to 2000, it increased by 32%.

**Figure 6.6 Per Capita Annual Income of Urban Households
between 1978 and 2000**

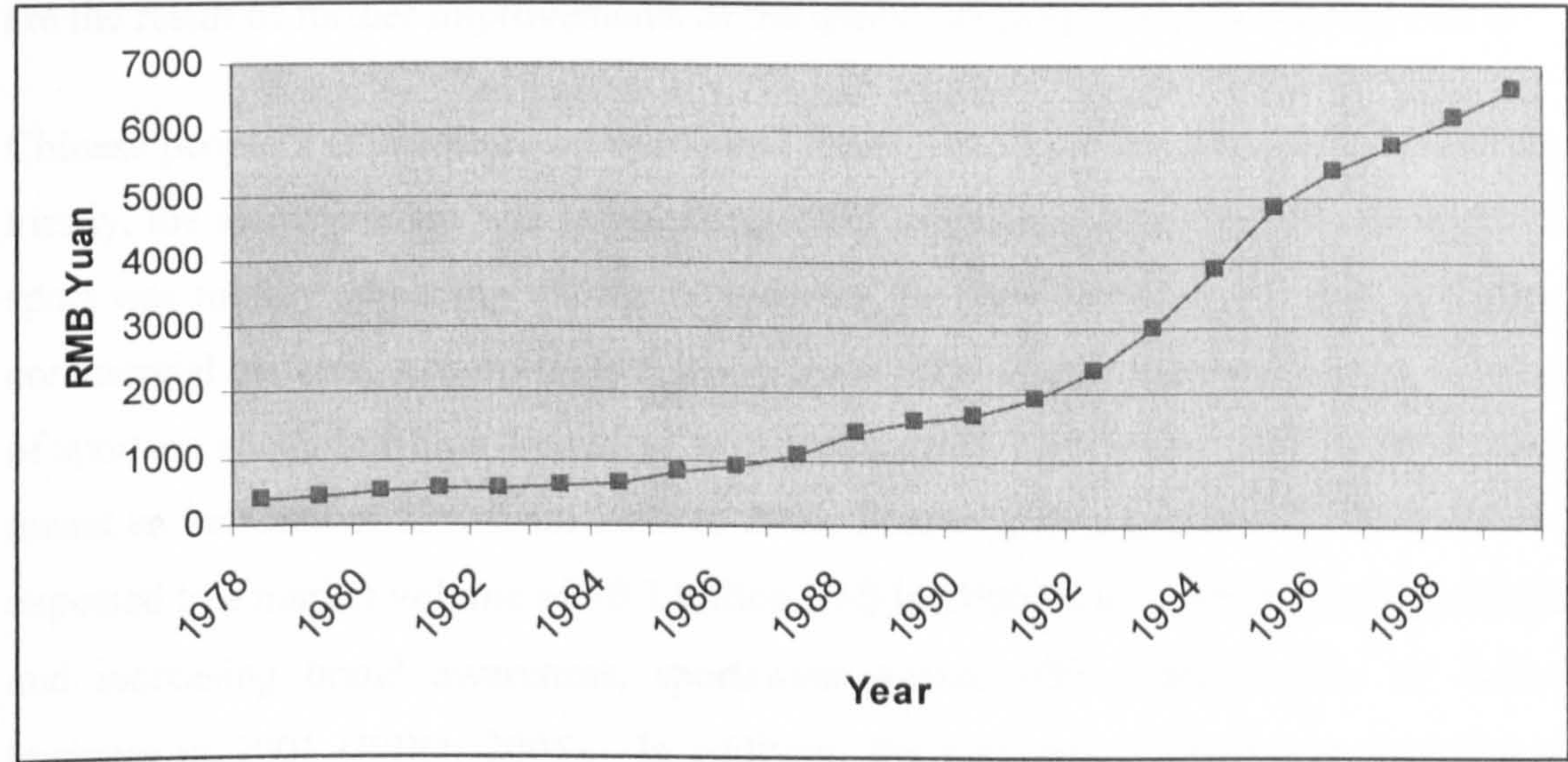


Source: NSB, 2001,
<http://www.china.org.cn/english/shuzi-en/en-shuzi/rm/htm/biao/10-3.htm>.

The second aspect is that when the government reduced its control over the flow of commodities, it also ceded greater autonomy to everyday social activities, which substantially boosted urban commercial exchange according to market principles (Davis, 2000: 3). The growth of income and enhanced commercial exchange has nurtured individual desires for consumption. According to the statistics, the levels of urban household consumption rose from 405 yuan (81 US\$) annually in 1979 to 6,651 yuan (831 US\$) in 1999 (NSB, 2001) (see Figure 6.7).

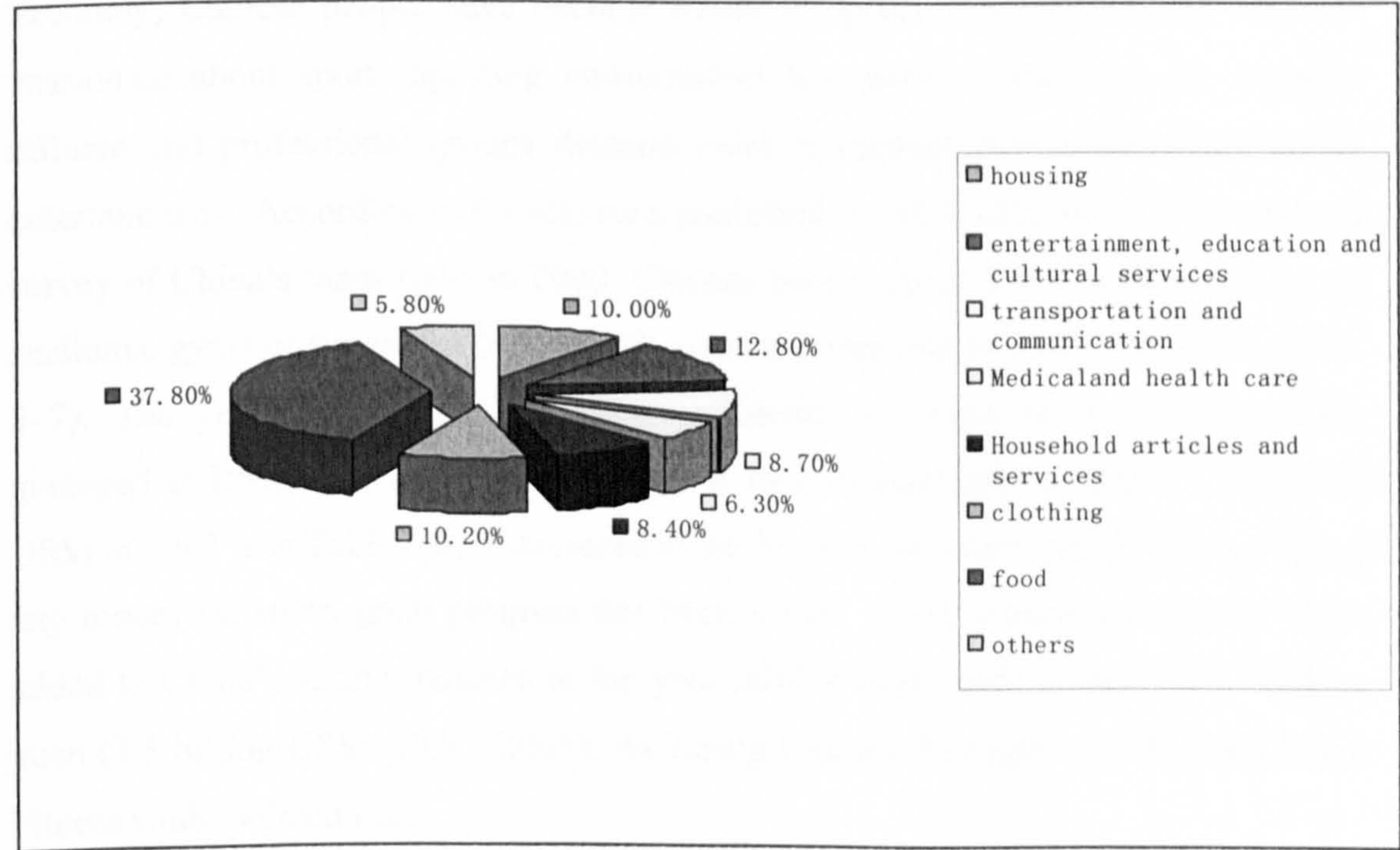
¹¹ In 1978 per capita income was 316 RMB, in 1990 it was 1,387 RMB, and in 1994 it was 3,179 RMB. Indexed with 1978 as 100, per capita income had grown to 197 in 1990 and 237 in 1994. *China Statistical Yearbook 1995*, p.257.

Figure 6.7 Consumption of Urban Households between 1978 and 1999



Source: NSB, 2001,
<http://www.china.org.cn/english/shuzi-en/en-shuzi/index.htm>.

Figure 6.8 Consumption Structure of Chinese Urbanites in 2001



Source: NSB and the Urban Statistics Committee (USC), 2003.

Along with soaring gross consumption, the structure of consumption has changed. Figure 6.8 shows the new consumption structure of Chinese households in the recent statistics. Proportionately, expenses for food, clothing and basic daily utilities have greatly declined. Those for housing, transportation, telecommunications, medical and

health care, culture, education and entertainment have radically grown. These changes are the result of further improvements of the quality of people's lives (Zhang, 2003).

Chinese people's expenditure on sports and fitness activities has also grown gradually. Firstly, the sports market was establishing itself in Chinese cities and the business of sport was rapidly spreading within the industry, its federations, clubs, stars and their commercial backers. According to a report from ISPO China, the total market volume of sporting goods in China amounted to approximately 25.9 billion US\$ in 2001. This meant an increase of 23% from 1999 to 2001. Further strong growth of 15% p.a. was expected to a market volume of 50.3 billion US\$ in 2006. Due to strong fashion trends and increasing brand awareness, sportswear gained 60% market share of sports business in 2001 (ISPO, 2005). In addition, the business of sport was varied and immense. It fed off not only the most established sports of football, basketball, volleyball, swimming and table tennis but also the emergence of more 'Westernised' sports, for example, motor racing, tennis and golf.

Secondly, Chinese people have become aware of sports consumption and they are passionate about sport. Sporting consumption has grown rapidly as the younger affluent and professional groups demand more recognised brands and more sports entertainment. According to the statistics published in 2002, after the second national survey of China's mass sport in 2000, Chinese people spent 8.8% of their money on stadiums, gyms or fitness centres, a 0.2% increase over that in 1996 (Bai et al., 2005: 5-7). The yearly expenditure of urban residents on sport, taken by household, averaged at RMB 192 (24 US\$) in 1991. It rose dramatically to RMB 1,385 (173 US\$) in 2003 (see Table 6.6). Compared to the Maoist era, when people did not spend any money on sport, great progress has been made. It was estimated that the value added to China's sports industry in the year 2010 would reach at least 28.12 billion yuan (3.5 billion US\$) (COC, 2005). As Zhang Lin, the Manager of CSI-Bally Total Fitness Club, pointed out:

Spending some of their income just on sport was something unbelievable for ordinary Chinese 20 to 30 years ago. But sport has now become a regular part of many urban Chinese residents' consumption, with their income considerably increased during the past years.

(Interviewee No. 33, 2003)

Thirdly, the structure of sports consumption has the profile shown in Table 6.7. At the end of 2003, expense on sports utilities has been declined. The spending on fitness gyms, sports travel, sports mass media and tickets for sports matches have increased (Bai, 2005: 5–7). Going to fitness gyms and sports travel by car have become new focuses for sports consumption among high earners.

Table 6.6 Changes in Household Consumption of Sport (RMB)

	1991	1996	1999	2003
Household income	6250	15909	21435	32501
Household consumption	5291	13567	17791	22973
Sports consumption	192	679	740	1385
%	3.62	5.01	4.18	6.03

(RMB 8 =1 US\$)

Table 6.7 The Structure of Sports Consumption (%)

	1991	1996	1999	2003
Sports Travel	N/A	N/A	N/A	29.34
Sportswear	31.40	21.12	18.83	9.61
Sports shoes	30.40	20.11	23.07	12.51
Sports utilities	22.39	40.90	36.45	23.29
Sports print media	4.64	8.70	7.8	6.25
Sports nutrition	11.18	5.02	7.04	9.37
Tickets for matches	0.02	4.78	6.85	9.63

Note: investigation samples: 4,497 samples in 1991; 2,982 samples in 1996; 2,176 samples in 1999; 5,316 samples in 2004.

Table 6.6 and Table 6.7 Source: Bai *et al*, 2005.

The research shows that Chinese women have become more sports-conscious than before and are often willing to spend more money on sporting pursuits including sports wear and equipment, venue service and sports training. An interviewee indicated that:

Since my family started to run our own business, the living standards of my family have risen. We have our own property and private car. Unlike the old days, we do not need to worry about how to make money; we are now thinking about how to spend money wisely. My children have grown up. They have their own business. I began to think of myself... I decided to pay for annual membership of a fitness club, which was 5,500 yuan (687 US\$), so that I could participate in aerobics, yoga and Latin dance under the instruction of my coach. I do not worry too much about the money. A healthy life is of the greatest importance.

(Interviewee No. 7, 2003)

The interviewee demonstrated that the rise in income and standards of living was a crucial precondition for enabling women to consume sports activities. Apart from economic conditions, the change in the concept of the consumer has been another vital factor stimulating women's sports consumption behaviour. *China Daily* reported in July 2005:

An annual membership card, priced at 5,500 yuan (US\$ 687), is definitely not small spending for the 26-year-old woman who earns 2,500 yuan (US\$ 312) a month. But Miss Wang says it is worth it.

"I cannot save much money as the salary is so low. If I didn't spend the money here, I would probably have spent it all on shopping," says Wang, "I come here to be healthy," said Wang, proudly showing off her svelte body.

"You only have one life, one body."

Source: 'Fitness Fetish', *China Daily*, July the 18th, 2005

Participation in sport as a consumer activity has become a tendency in Chinese women's sport. It is a sign of an increased desire for material life and women's desire for enrichment. Buying sport and related goods has become a new concept internalised by some women. An interviewee commented that:

Actually, compared to my income, sports consumption just counts for a small proportion of my spending. However, this small expenditure has brought a great change of my life. I have become more healthy, sociable and active. I believe consuming sport will be gradually accepted by Chinese women.

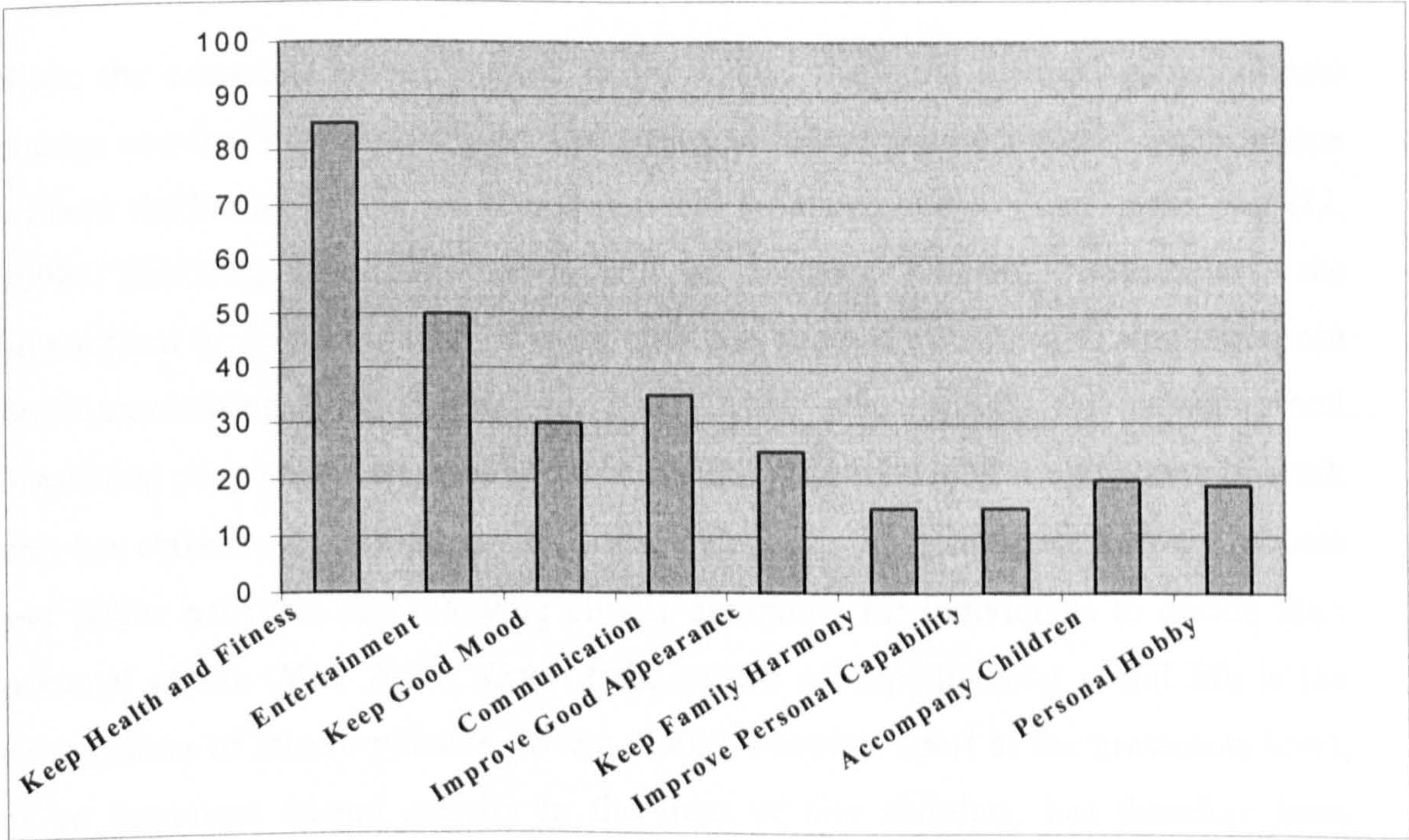
(Interviewee No. 10, 2004)

The consumption of sporting goods is based critically on women's economic capacity

and living conditions. Optimistically, it predicts the way that Chinese women's sport is developing at the grassroots and can become the principal factor in influencing mainstream participation. However, this aim realistically is for the future, because there are still a large number of women in cities who cannot afford expensive sports commodities.

In conclusion, from analysing the evidence from the perspectives of health, leisure and consumption, it can be seen that women's individual expectations for enhancing their material and cultural life are the main force driving the transformation of women's sport. Women's increasing demands for health and fitness, recreation and consumption reflect women's physical, psychological, economic, social and cultural ambitions in contemporary China. Figure 6.9 lists the result of a survey on the motivations for women's sports participation in 1999 (Ma, 1999). This survey investigated 1,000 women in different cities. From the variety of motivations, it can be concluded that it is women's own pursuit of a good quality of life that has created the value system of women's sport in the post-Mao era. Sport is emphatically seen as a way for women to express themselves, realise themselves and improve themselves.

Figure 6.9 Women's Diverse Motivations for Sports Participation



Note: This survey investigated 500 women in big cities; 300 in medium cities; and 200 in small cities.
Source: Ma, 1999.

6.5 Forms: The Transformation of Urban Institutional Structure and the New Forms of Urban Women's Sports Participation

Women's individual pursuits, as discussed, have become the driving force in the transformation of women's sport since the 1980s. However, without a rational institutional structure, women's personal pursuits could not have been fully achieved and the transformation could not have happened. The change of institutional structures during urbanisation was a fundamental condition for the transformation of women's sport at the grassroots. The decline in the power of the state and the proliferation of new economic and social organisations unquestionably enlivened city life. It also opened up new venues for both public and private interaction (David, 2000 and Fan, 2000). Under these circumstances, sport as a personal affair as well as a social activity has gained more room to develop. This has stimulated the emergence of community sport and voluntary sport organisations, which provide women with choices to be engaged in sporting pursuits.

6.5.1 Expanding Autonomy and Diversified Forms of Women's Sports Participation

Since the economic reform started in the 1980s, the most distinctive institutional change was that state-owned work units became independent economic organisations without the burden of the social and political functions tied to them in the past (Li, 1998: 209–216). Certainly this is still an ongoing process. Nevertheless, the hierarchical or vertical system of work units has generally changed to single-purpose profit-maximising firms (Li and Li, 2000). Their responsibility for managing and organising people's social lives is in the decline. The reduction in the power of work unit has certainly depoliticised social life, redefining the boundaries between private and public activities and allowing greater autonomy for individuals to decide their personal affairs (Yin, 2002). One of the results of depoliticising social life is the privatisation of leisure pursuits (Wang, 2000). People's sport at the grassroots level, as an important leisure activity in the lives of city dwellers, has therefore been privatised. In other words, people can utilise sports activities for their individual benefit. Chinese women accordingly have changed their ideas about sport. As an

interviewee stated:

In my opinion, sport is a matter for individuals. We should have rights to choose which sports activities or events we are interested in and willing to take part in. I believe participation in sport should be a happy activity not just a political task.

(Interviewee No. 22, 2003)

Once released from the bureaucratic system, women have gained autonomy to decide whether, when and how to participate in sport. With relative freedom, women have unleashed previously suppressed emotions, expressed previously hidden desires and pursued interests not previously allowed, thus considerably stimulating an increase in women's enthusiasm for sport in Chinese cities. One middle-aged interviewee described her own sports experience:

In the past, women were forced into taking part in physical exercises and sports events such as workers' sports events in autumn and spring. I was quite sure that most of us just looked at it as a stern task to complete, but not a way to develop ourselves, because it was associated with our bonus and political credit (*zhengzhi bian xian*) in work units. But now, the situation has changed. Nobody forces me to do sports, while I keep doing exercise nearly every day. There are lots of women like me. We all enjoy the free, clean and clear atmosphere in taking part in sport.

(Interviewee No. 23, 2003)

Mr Zhao Xiaoyong, the Director of the Sports Department of Fucheng District, Mianyang, Sichuan Province, compared the situations of women's sports participation before and after the 1980s in his community:

In my 15 years experience working in sports department, in the past, it was difficult to persuade women to participate in sport. Although the work units, schools and enterprises provided sports facilities and organised sports activities regularly, it was a political task, so that many women were not really interested in sport. Now the situation has changed. Women are passionate about sport and physical exercise. It is because they have personal demands for participating in sport either for fitness or for recreation. They gather in parks, squares and neighbourhoods. They bring their own tape-recorders; buy their own sports suits and equipment. They pay coaches of their own accord and collect money for team activities.

(Interviewee No. 34, 2004)

Critical theory suggests that sport changes with visions of cultural and social life, which people use to make sense of the world around them (Coakley, 2001). In the Maoist era, sports activities were disciplined and dull for women. For example, the 'Broadcast Exercises', which was the dominating sports activity for women at the grassroots, was designed by the government and required people to take part in them at the same time and in the same places (see Appendix E, Photo 1). In the post-Mao era, women's sports activities have become increasingly diverse and are substantially based on women's own preferences and requirements. Generally speaking, walking, Disco dance, *Yangge*¹² dance, *Taiji wu*, aerobics and badminton are popular among women. Tennis, skating, hiking, *Shebin*,¹³ Yoga and aqua aerobics lead the fashion in sport (COC, 2005; Bai *et al.*, 2005). However, different age groups of women tend to take part in different kinds of sport. Middle-aged and elderly Chinese women tend to take part in gentler and more traditional exercises such as walking, *Taiji*, *Yangge* and Disco dance. *Taiji wu* (Taiji dance), created as a new form of exercise, combines traditional sport with modern elements. A participant of *Taiji wu* explained:

Actually, physical exercises are a preserving activity, especially individual exercise such as some Chinese traditional sports like *Taiji Boxing*. Thus we just wondered: if we could combine the rules of *Taiji* into dance, would it be more interesting and attractive? The fact proved that *Taiji* dance has been increasingly becoming popular among women. It not only meets the aims of exercising bodies, but also brings aesthetic perception to women. Now we are just thinking of combining more traditional sports with modern forms.

(Interviewee No. 25, 2003)

Young and high-income women would rather choose some modern sporting equipment associated with world fashion. Gyms, sports clubs, outdoor and extreme sports are foremost among their choices (Zhang, 2002c); and imported exercises from Western countries such as aerobics, yoga, boxing exercise, Latin dance and hip-hop dance have entered their lives. As Ma Li, the Director of Sports Department of Chongwen District in Beijing concluded:

¹² A Chinese traditional dance, which was performed in festivals in the old days. Now people dance *Yangge* as a way of physical exercise.

¹³ This comes from Russia's traditional training course for choosing beautiful women. This training programme includes food nutrition, body exercise and dance. It focused on how to shape a woman's body into a fit and slim figure.

Nowadays for Chinese women the best thing is that they can have a chance to choose their lives, and moreover they have multiple choices.

(Interviewee No. 31, 2003)

In addition to the diversification of sports activity emerging into women's life, another significant and meaningful change is that different forms of participation coexist in society. In the past, women could only participate in sport with their schools or work units. When voluntary sports organisations emerged in the 1980s, they provided women with new opportunities. As Table 6.8 shows, the voluntarily organised sports activities have played a prominent role in leading sport at the grassroots.

Table 6.8 Proportion of People's Sports Participation in Different Organised Forms

	Numbers	Proportion %
Exercise organisations	381	100.00
Voluntarily organised by residents	219	57.50
Organised by local sports administration	29	7.6
Organised by resident committee	68	17.80
Organised by work units	13	3.40
Organised by sports associations	14	3.70
Organised by schools and enterprises	24	6.30
others	14	3.70

Note: This survey covered 144 communities in 9 provinces. 381 sports organisations were investigated.
Source: *Zhongguo qunzhong xianzhuang diaocha*, [Investigation and Research of Chinese Mass Sport (IRCMS)], 1998.

Unlike the work-unit management system, these voluntary sports organisations tend to put women's preferences and interests first. The voluntary sector has given women expanded choices. According to the Survey of Beijing Women's Sports Activities in 1998, some urban Chinese women preferred to participate in exercises individually; some liked to join sports or exercises groups with friends, colleagues, classmates and neighbours; some liked taking part in sport with their children or husbands; some continued to take part in sport in work units (work-unit-organised sports events) alongside attending community sport (community-supported sports activities) (Ma,

1999). We need to explain further that these different forms of sports participation were intertwined and intersected with each other. For example, some women preferred to take part in community sport with their friends; other women preferred to attend their friends' sport events with their family. Women's sports participation has advanced to a stage of diversity and coexistence.

6.5.2 The Formation of Women's Community Sport

Although individual and small-group sports activities were still the mainstream of women's sport in the 1990s, along with the establishment of community service system in Chinese cities, women's taking part in community sport (*shequ tiyu*) is seen as the most prominent trend, which may lead to the further development of Chinese women's sport in the next decades (Ren and Wang, 1998). Community sport in China is a newly emerging form of sport in the 1990s based on a new kind of urban institution – the community service system. The community service system (*shequ fuwu tixi*) as a concept was officially introduced into Chinese cities in 1986. It was partly a response to the disintegration of the traditional welfare system that was tied to work units (Yang, 2002), and was set up at the level of either a street office or a residents' committee (Xia, 1996). It was related to the special interests of various government agencies at different levels and was intended to 'use community resources motivated by the development of community services to deal with civil affairs' (Xia, 1996: 18). The aim was to build a healthy and integral community, which could improve residents' living conditions and strengthen the economic, political and cultural development of urban society (Tang and Parish, 2000).

Community sport was a product of the community service system. Since sports participation can improve the quality of urban people's lives and strengthen the integration and cohesion of a community, it has been highly promoted and became a part of the community service system (Yu, 1997). Consequently, the community has been playing a substantial role in changing women's sports at the grassroots.

Firstly, communities offer a good atmosphere and a free space for women to choose when, where and how to take part in sports activities according to their own preference. In communities, women can seek an alternative to the mainstream and

male-dominated sports. In pursuit of alternatives, they have established their own programmes and organisations. In separating from the mainstream, they have gained autonomy and helped develop women-centred activities. This is the most remarkable difference from work-unit and government-organised sport.

Secondly, the community services system provides women with extensive resources to participate in sport. For example, it tries to make sports facilities more accessible to women and offers free sports instruction to women.

Thirdly, communities have set up voluntary sports organisations either run by resident volunteers or led by residents' committees. Voluntary sports organisations consist of registered and non-registered sports organisations. Registered voluntary sports organisations are named sports associations (*tiyu xiehui*). Sports associations can receive a small amount of funding from the government. Most of their income comes from a membership fee or from commercial sponsors. Non-registered voluntary sports organisations are called sports groups (*duanlian xiaoqunti*) (Huang, 2004). There is no formal regulation for these groups and the forms of participation are very casual and flexible. Participants simply attend and pay a small fee each time when they participate. Participants in sports groups might have the same interests on sport or might have some social connections (*guanxi*), such as classmates, neighbours, colleagues or relatives. At present, the non-registered sports voluntary organisation is the main form of women's community sport in Chinese cities.

Women's sport in communities is very diverse. It is a result of a range of influences: historical factors, different disciplines and abilities within the sport, different interests and policies in different regions. As far as women are concerned, they like playing games and doing exercises on their own rather than taking part in restricted activities organised by the work units, residents' committees or formal sporting bodies, all of which the government still supervises and controls (Huang, 2004). Voluntary sports organisations in the communities satisfy women's needs by providing them with an autonomous climate and new values in sport (Li, 2001c: 4–5).

According to women's own experience, they benefit from community sport. As the organiser of *Taiji* Groups in Huawei Community said:

Our funding is based entirely on voluntary, personal money and is independent of state sponsorship; membership is fluid, with individuals often entering multiple associations. Our organisation consists of women who are range in age from the twenties to the sixties who meet everyday to practise together. After exercising in a group, some members often break into vigorous Disco dancing or share morning snacks. We also meet outside our regular practice site, going for picnics in other parks or visiting someone's home. We are like sisters in a big family.

(Interviewee No. 25, 2003)

An exerciser on fitness paths stated:

Before the middle 1990s, there were no specific spaces and facilities in residential districts. We could just exercise in the narrow streets. It was dangerous because of the heavy traffic. After the establishment of community service centres in residential districts, there emerged specific spaces with fitness paths. Sports theme squares have also emerged. With these concentrated activity centres, more and more women come out to do exercises. They also become the main space for women to communicate with each other.

(Interviewee No. 16, 2004)

A *Taiji* exerciser expressed her appreciation of sports instructors in the community:

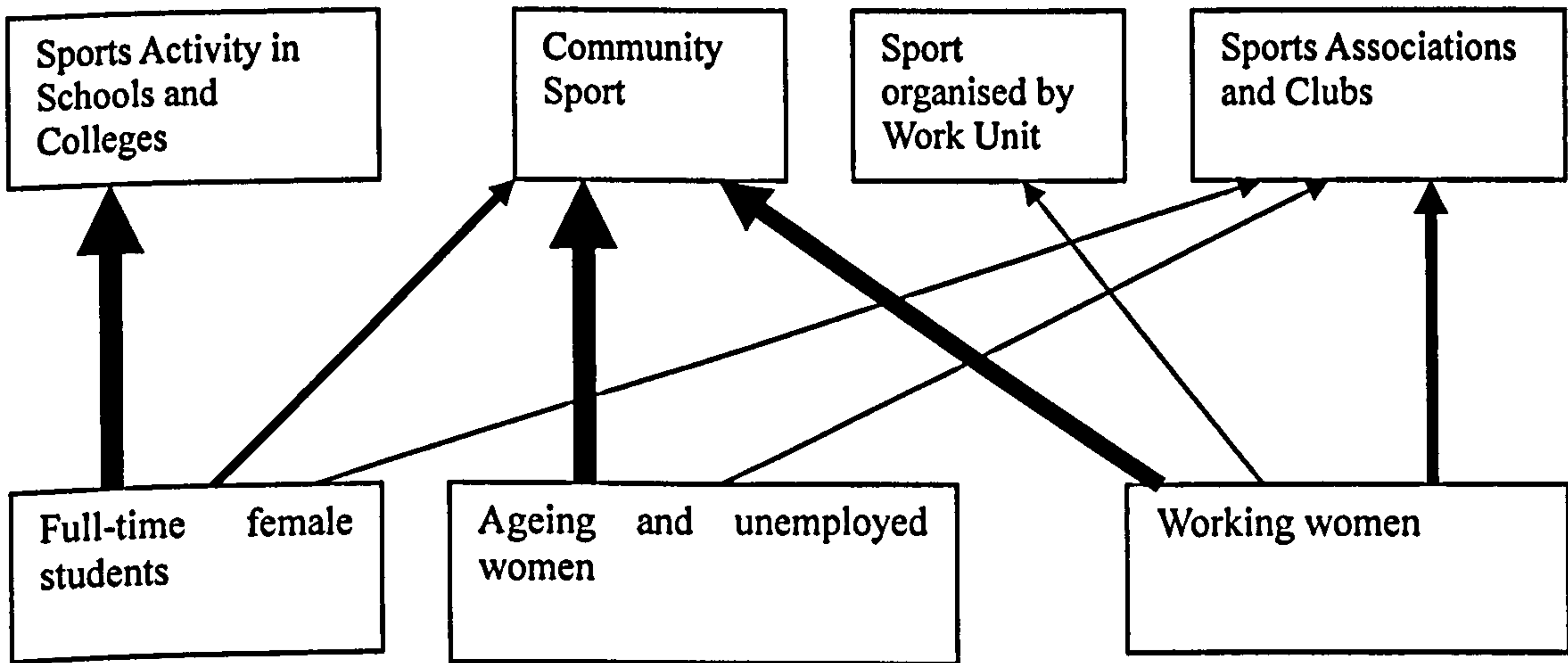
I wanted to learn *Taiji* very much. I learned it following a DVD. However, I found it too difficult without specific instruction. Then I came out of my home, joined the association of *Taiji* in my community and began to learn from Coach Chen [a sports instructor in Chongwen Longtan Park Sports Community]. Step by step, I could not only grasp the skills but also got to know the internal laws of *Taiji* movement. Coach Chen was really helpful. I made rapid progress in a few months. In the *Taiji* competition held in 2002 in Chongwen district, I was awarded the third prize. I was so excited, which encouraged me to do exercise everyday.

(Interviewee No. 21, 2003)

In conclusion, along with urbanisation, the form of urban women's sport has been transformed extensively and intensively. The transition of urban institutional structures from the work-unit's vertical system into the community's horizontal service system has been a major factor. It has considerably changed the relationship between government, social organisations and women's sport. Unlike the work-unit system, which tended to bind everyone's life to governmental control (Pejovich, 1995), community sport tends to prioritise urban residents' autonomy, demands and free

expression. Women's sport at the grassroots accordingly has been shifted from organised and controlled activities to self-initiated and voluntarily organised activities. The emergence of community sport offers Chinese women comparative freedom in sports participation. In addition, in the communities, women-centred sport and recreational activities have proliferated. Furthermore, through sport, Chinese women are building their own communities around shared interests and collective goals. This involves deliberate efforts to move away from elite sport towards a more cooperative and inclusive one. Based on their demands, Figure 6.11 shows that community sport is the major form of activity among the ageing, unemployed and employed women; there is also an increasing demand for sports associations and clubs among employed women; the role of work units in women's sport is reduced.

Figure 6.10 Women's Sport in Different Forms



Source: Gu and Li, 2001 and IRCMS, 1998.

6.6 Space: The Specialisation of Urban Physical Structure and Expanded Space for Women's Sport

The transformation of urban institutional structure has politically released women's sport at the grassroots from the vertical system of the work unit. This change, as discussed, has enlarged urban women's autonomy and opportunities to pursue sport as a means of increasing the quality of their lives. For the further development of

women's sport, the rearrangement of physical structures in cities has created space and provided diversified access for women's sports activities. It has been a necessary condition for the transformation of sporting pursuits and has contributed enormously to women's sports pursuits.

Since the beginning of urbanisation, social and economic changes have had a substantial impact on the urban physical structure with the transformation of industry, housing, transportation and other aspects of spatial organisation in cities (Ma and Wu, 2005). In contrast to the generalised arrangement of urban space developed during the Maoist period, since the 1980s the urban physical structure has been gradually transformed. It consists of spatially distinct districts which tend towards functional specialisation, such as residential districts, commercial districts or recreational districts, aiming to devote to different activities so that urban dwellers could utilise urban space for commercial, industrial and residential purposes (Gaubatz, 1995). In this process, the separation of residential districts from the workplace, the redevelopment of city central squares and municipal parks for recreation and the growth of commercial districts are the major factors in a process that seeks to contribute to economic development as well as to the improvement of urbanites' living standards (Association of Chinese Mayors, 2003). This assigns particular spaces for sports activities and gives women more access to sport.

6.6.1 Construction of Residential Neighbourhoods and Women's Sport

In contrast to previous practices before 1980, housing construction in the post-Mao era has been administratively and spatially separated from the workplace (Li, 1991). The increasing physical separation of housing and the workplace has contributed to the dramatic changes in employees' social activities outside working hours. Many aspects of people's life can occur outside the spatial and organisational bounds of the work unit (Gaubatz, 1995); residential districts are becoming the main spaces for urban dwellers' private activities. Being separated from the workplace, residential neighbourhoods provide urban people with a civic atmosphere in which to live.

In the 1990s, the new tendency with residential districts was to mix residential, service and commercial functions to construct a new style of residential

neighbourhood (Gaubatz, 1995). Ideally, the new residential developments were expected to provide a variety of social services for their residents in order to maintain 'convenience' in the residential system. In order to meet residents' demands for exercise in neighbourhoods, many residential districts in Chinese cities were equipped with fitness paths, table tennis tables and basketball hoops, with the apparatus funded by the sports lottery. By the end of 2004, there were 23,319 fitness paths, 5,920 table tennis tables, 13,790 basketball stands and 2,820 sets of physique-testing equipment built in urban residential districts (COC, 2005). The free and accessible sports facilities built in residential districts stimulated the popularity of participating in exercises and sport in neighbourhoods (see Figure 6.11).

Women are the biggest group to take advantage of these changes for their own interests. Either in the morning or in the evening, groups of women come out of their homes to join in exercises and sport in their neighbourhoods. Some of them gather to Disco dance in the empty spaces of the street; some play badminton with their families on playgrounds; some walk and jog along roads. According to the IRCMS II report in 2004, more women than men tend to choose to exercise in their neighbourhoods (COC, 2005). One reason seems to be that women's double burden of work and home tend to prevent them going too far from home; another reason is the economic constraints that make them choose unpaid-for spaces for physical exercise. An exerciser stated:

As a working-class woman, I do not have fixed time to join professional sports activities. Taking part in physical exercise in my neighbourhood is very casual and convenient. In addition, I do not need to pay for it.

(Interviewee No. 18, 2004)

The governmental contribution in supplying free sports facilities in residential districts also attract women to exercise in their neighbourhoods. An interviewee said:

Three years ago, there was no sport facility in our neighbourhood. Women used trees as bars, empty spaces and sports arenas to exercise. Now, our neighbourhood has been supplied with a 'fitness path'. It is more convenient for exercise and attracts more and more women to come out to do exercise.

(Interviewee No. 13, 2003)

Residential districts provide women not only with access to free sports arenas and

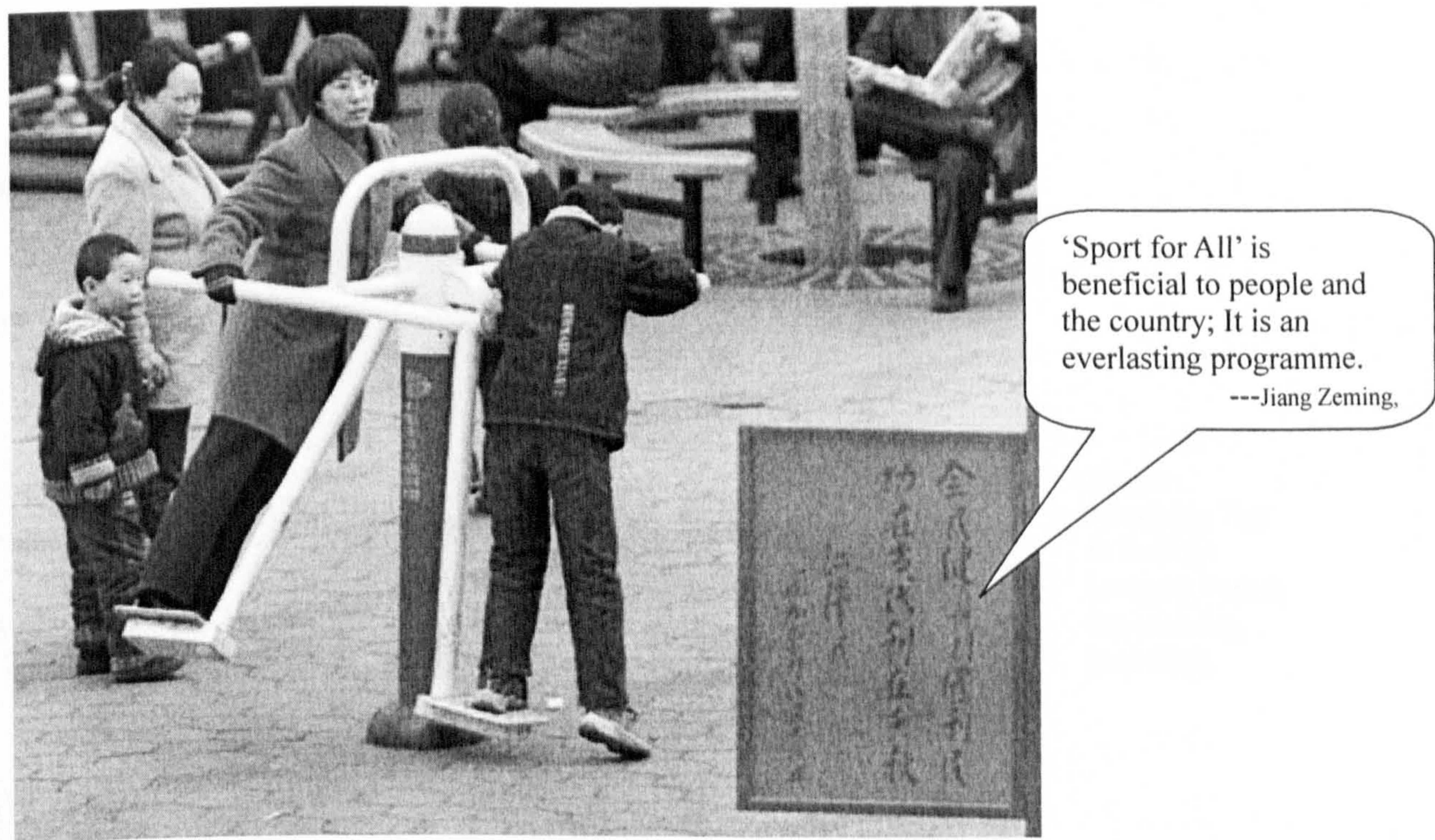
facilities, but also with an autonomous climate and intimate atmosphere. In neighbourhood gatherings, they meet friends and have fun. As one exerciser indicated:

Doing exercises in the residential neighbourhood makes me feel comfortable, like being at home. Those people who exercise in the neighbourhood are my neighbours. I feel very safe. Besides, it is a good communication opportunity.

(Interviewee No. 11, 2003)

This statement implies that the formation of residential districts outside the direct control of bureaucratic bodies has created relatively autonomous spaces for women's social activities. Although with the development of cities, there is less empty space in neighbourhoods for people's outdoor activities, due to less bureaucratic control by work units over residential districts, a mental space for communities has been established and expanded in women's lives through their sports activities in the neighbourhoods.

Picture 6.1 Enjoying Exercising in a Neighbourhood in 2003



‘Sport for All’ is beneficial to people and the country; It is an everlasting programme.
---Jiang Zeming,

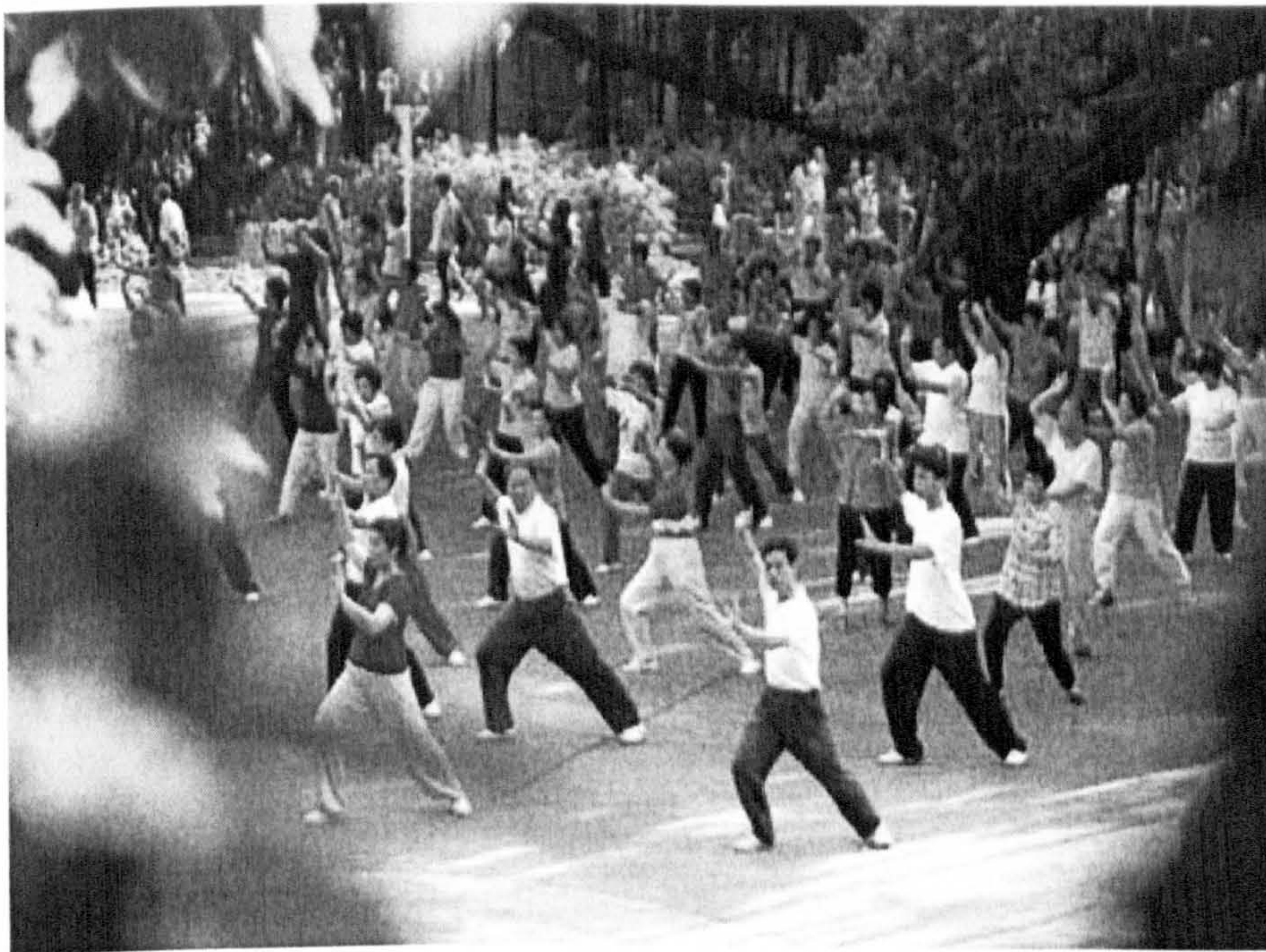
Sources: COC website.

A woman is doing exercises on a fitness path in a neighbourhood in Lanzhou City in December 2003.

6.6.2 The Rise of Parks and Squares and Women's Sport

Public parks and squares utilise another space in urban society for women's sport and physical exercises. Urbanisation has created urban problems such as loosened social ties, lost opportunities for reflection, repose and desensitisation. In order to solve these problems, squares and parks have been constructed or reconstructed in an attempt to elevate the moral and social life of the city (Ye, 2002). Unlike the Western parks movement in the 19th century, which tended to build parks far from the centre of cities and make public parks a middle-class resort (Riess, 1989), Chinese urban parks and squares have usually been built in the centre of a city or near residential districts. They have natural surroundings with trees and fresh air accessible to normal urban dwellers seeking refuge and retaining a semblance of privacy and anonymity away from work and home (Chen, 1995). Chinese urban parks and squares are designed as the centres of recreation in which city dwellers experience the pleasure of looking at tranquil scenes, gentle streams and grassy meadows. They are also becoming a space for people's sports activities. Picture 6.2 shows people in a park in Beijing doing morning *Taiji* exercises.

Picture 6.2 *Taiji* Exercises in a Park in Beijing in 2002



People
exercising *Taiji*
in Beijing's
Longran Park in
the morning,
June 2002.

Source: COC Website.

Parks and squares have several advantages for women's sports participation. Firstly, Chinese parks and squares are mostly located in the inner city, where the transportation system is very convenient. In China, most women use public transport or ride bicycles. As a result, it is impossible for women to go to sports venues outside the city. Secondly, entrance tickets to the park are very cheap. Some are even free. Chinese women, who generally have lower incomes than men, prefer the advantages of parks. Thirdly, the relatively larger spaces and natural environments are an attractive factor for women. They can jog on the lanes, play badminton on meadows and exercise *Taiji* under trees. Since frozen ponds simply replenish themselves during the winter, they can skate on them without damaging the natural beauty of the park. The same space can be used for boating in the spring after the ice melts. It is perceived as a romantic place for women's sports activities. Fourthly, in parks, women can freely choose sports activities they are interested in. They can exercise alone or play games with partners or join in group exercises. With the advantages of natural and social conditions, parks and squares have become fascinating spaces for women to do their exercises.

According to my participant observations in the People's Park and the Riverside Square in Mianyang, every morning and evening, many women gather together there to do exercise (see Appendix E, Photos 10, 11). The weekday exercisers go from 6 am to 8 am. The people believe the air in the early morning in parks is the best. An exerciser explained that:

I have kept doing exercises in the park for 3 years. I come every morning. If it rains, I exercise in pavilions in the park. Chinese people believe that the best season of a year is spring and the best time of a day is the early morning. Although in the morning it is quite busy and noisy in the streets because of the heavy traffic, the park remains a quiet and peaceful place for exercising. After exercise, I would feel energetic for the whole day.

(Interviewee No. 24, 2003)

Some women prefer the morning sessions. Some prefer the evening sessions (see Appendix E, Photo 12). After finishing their housework, they come out to the squares and parks to walk, dance *Yangge* or Disco. An interviewee said:

In the day time, it is very difficult to find a proper time and proper place to do exercise. In the evening, after finishing all work and housework, I

eventually have some leisure time to come out to do physical exercises. In the park and the square, many people dance, exercise and play. It is because only parks and squares can accommodate so many people to do outdoor activities together. Another reason is the natural, recreational and relaxing climate in parks and squares which reduces all-day stress from the workplace and home.

(Interviewee No. 27, 2004)

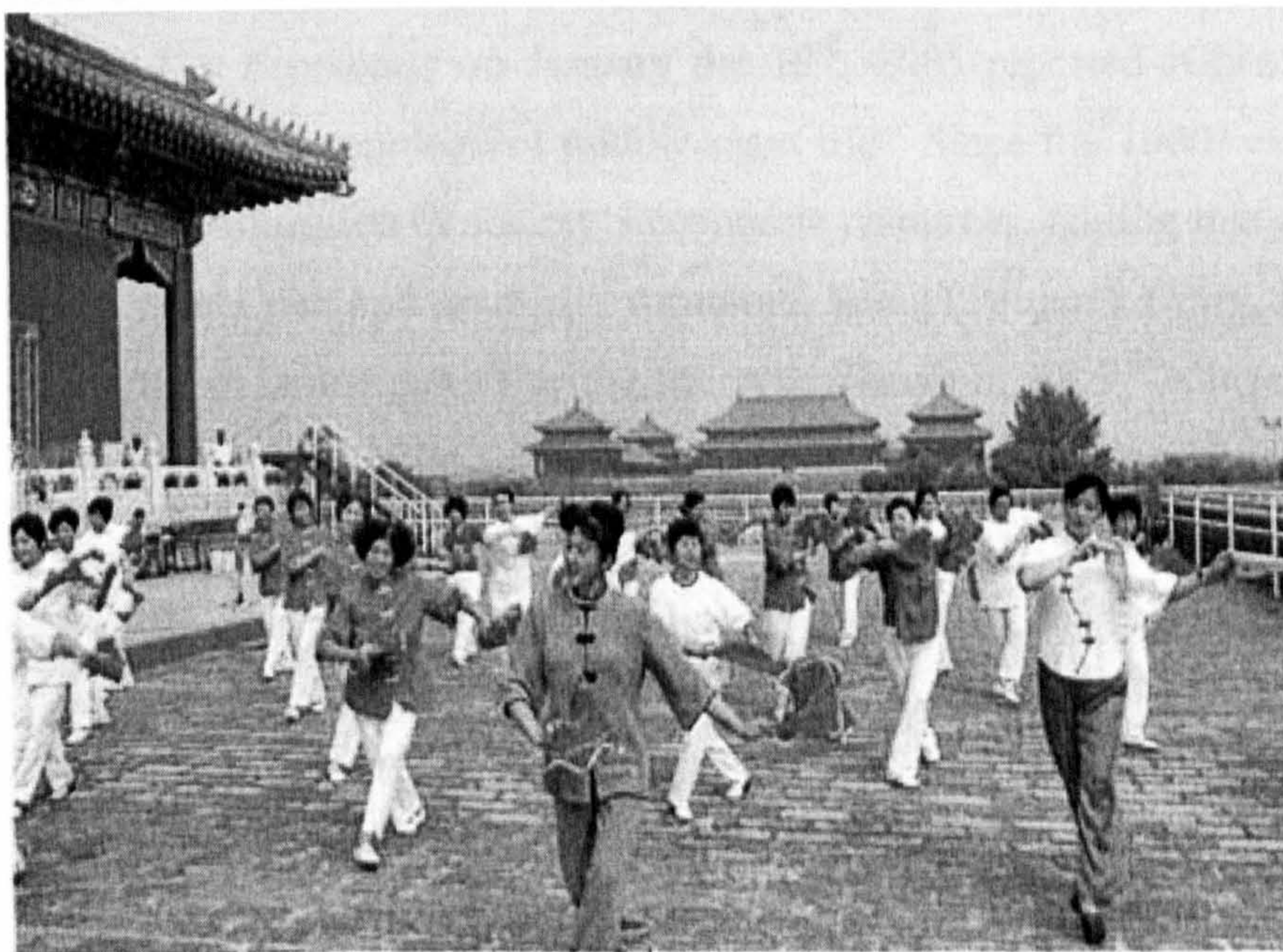
Developing sports activities in parks and squares has been a nationwide movement since the reform of sports in China. The central and local governments have made constant efforts to construct a 'park culture' (*Gongyuan wenhua*) in order to provide people with a civic space to take part in sport. For example, the Mianyang municipal government launched a 'light-up' and 'music-up' movement in parks and squares. It also built up some simple but useful facilities and services for women. For example, they set up table tennis tables; rented badminton courts and rackets; built jogging lanes and cycling paths; and enclosed a block of place for dancing. They set more benches along the paths so that people could have a rest when they felt tired. These measures provided good conditions for women to participate in sport. As a participant in the park commented:

Natural environments, a relaxing atmosphere, improved facilities constitute an intense physical culture in parks and squares. In addition, the affordability and convenience are suitable for normal women whose incomes are not high, especially the retired women.

(Interviewee No. 24, 2003)

Picture 6.3 shows women dancing *Yangge* in the park.

Picture 6.3 *Yangge* Dance in Tiantan Park in 2003



Source: This photo was taken by the researcher in Tiantan Park in Beijing in 2003.

6.6.3 Formation of Commercial Districts and Women's Sport

Apart from taking part in physical exercises in residential districts and parks, in Chinese cities, new space has emerged for sports activities caused by commercial trends. Since the 1980s Chinese cities have experienced a revival of commercial functions in 'downtown' economic centres (Guabatz, 2005). The large population, improved interurban transportation systems, the rise of mass transit and the popularity of sport in central cities has encouraged entrepreneurs to build fitness clubs and indoor sports centres in commercial districts.

In addition, Chinese cities have also witnessed the emergence of a middle class. The research department of the BNP Paribas Peregrine defined China's 'middle class' as well-educated professionals and white-collar workers with a yearly income of RMB 25,000 (US\$ 3,125) to 30,000 (US\$ 3,750) per capita, i.e., RMB 75,000 (US\$ 9,375) to 100,000 (US\$ 12,500) a year per household, who partake in corporate decision-making and management and engage in intellectual work (*Xinhua News*, March the 26th, 2004). According to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), the

middle class in China accounted for 15% of the whole population in 1999 and then rose by 1% annually until it reached 19% in 2003 (*Xinhua News*, March the 26th, 2004). *The Economist* on January the 19th, 2005 reported 'Chinese cities are today aglow with the trappings of middle class life.' Since the 1980s economic reform has led to a re-allocation of society's economic resources. During this course, a new group of the newly rich had gradually come into being (*People's Daily*, July the 20th, 2001). Based on an investigation by the Merrylin Group in 2003,¹⁴ China had about 236,000 wealthy people in cities, each with more than US\$ 1 million in assets in 2003. China, with an increase of 12 per cent over the previous year, was second behind India which had a 22 per cent increase in the number of wealthy people (*Shenzheng Daily*, September the 14th, 2004).

The increasing middle class and the wealthy urban population have stimulated sports consumption. The proliferation of professional fitness gyms, sports centres and leisure complexes in the city's commercial centre has been created driven by the powerful consumer ability of these groups of people. It is hoped that when they go out shopping, eating and for other activities, they can easily find places to exercise their bodies. For example, in Beijing's New World Department Store, which was built in 2000, the whole basement was set up as a sports centre. It includes Haosha Fitness Clubs, an indoor ice-skating rink, a bowling hall and several sports shops selling sports clothes and facilities. This new commercial space for sports activities had an impact like a hurricane on the Chinese market. For example, in 2005, there were currently around 1,000 sport and entertainment clubs in Beijing, with over 100 of these being fitness centres and about 20 top fitness clubs all boasting floor areas of over 3,000 square metres (*China Daily*, July the 18th, 2000).

Women with high incomes possibly are the biggest potential consumers among many shoppers. Setting indoor sporting places in commercial districts provides these women with new opportunities for getting involved in sports activities. As an interviewee said:

¹⁴ Merrylin employed a special method for calculating wealth. It first estimated the total wealth of a country and then calculated the wealth distribution among adults. The calculations include shareholdings, bonds, funds and cash while excluding antiques, property and consumer goods. The wealth is calculated on financial assets, not including housing. Their total assets average 34 million yuan (US\$ 4.25 million), according to the report.

There was no space for any physical exercises in my company. I sat at my desk dealing with business all day long. It's really exhausting. One day I went shopping in a department store. I found a poster for the fitness gyms hanging on the wall. I went to the basement and had a look. I saw so many women wearing bikinis and dancing aerobics. Some of them were jogging on the machines. They were active and beautiful. I thought I had found a new world where I could totally relax myself. I was so excited and paid the membership fee immediately.

(Interviewee No. 5, 2004)

The rise of sporting places in commercial areas has not only widened the access of women's sport, but it has also broadened women's leisure activities from traditional shopping and watching films into participating in sport. As Ms Zhang stated:

In the past I liked shopping very much at weekend. Since the day I came to this indoor ice-skating rink, I could not help loving it. I usually come here with my friends at the weekend. Although the skating arena is not very big compared to professional ones, it is located in a commercial district, so transport is very convenient. The professional indoor ice-skating rinks are too far away and outdoor ones in parks are just open in winter. The new facilities for ice-skating in the store are just what we need. In addition, when we finish skating, we can go shopping here.

(Interviewee No. 3, 2003)

In the 1980s, attending a fitness gym meant spending on a five-star-hotel. Since the 1990s, going to a fitness gym has become a fashionable way of participating in sport for some middle class women, implying an increase in their living standards and disposable income. With free weekends, increasing salaries, an individualistic society and the continuing fad for all Western things, Chinese women are hitting the gym, taking to the slopes and trying out in ever-larger numbers sports that ten years ago did not even exist in China. The outstanding facilities, professional instruction and well-equipped services are the main elements attracting women to go to fitness gyms and indoor sports centres. A fitness club member commented:

I joined this gym because they advocate scientific workouts guided by personal trainers. Working out with others also creates a good atmosphere.

(Interviewee No. 4, 2004)

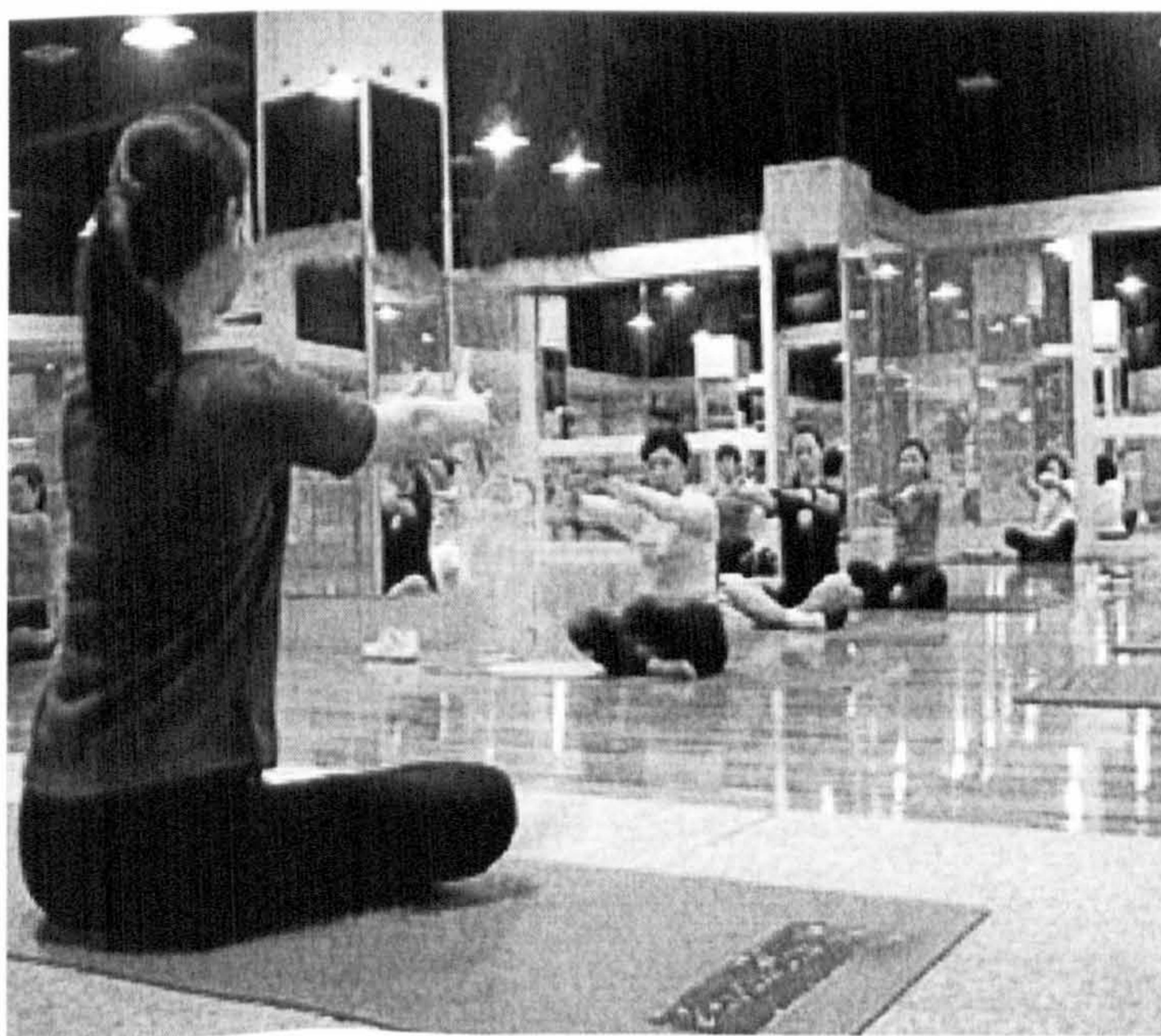
Another participant explained why she preferred fitness gyms to outdoor playgrounds:

I prefer indoor fitness gyms. Outdoor playgrounds are too hot in summer and too cold in winter. Indoor fitness gyms have professional services and a pleasant temperature for doing exercises. They are clean, clear and conformable places. Under these circumstances, I can completely involve myself in sport. When finishing exercise, participants can take showers immediately so that I do not worry about walking on the street with a sweaty and smelly body.

(Interviewee No. 6, 2003)

Increasing numbers of women have joined fitness gyms. In Beijing, for example, an estimated fifteen thousand people have signed up as members of fitness centres and nearly half of them were women in 2002 and 2003 (Luke, 2004). Fan Zheng, the director of the marketing office affiliated to the Beijing Sports Commission, has said that fitness gyms are still in great demand (*China Daily*, March the 10th, 2005).

Picture 6.4 Yoga Exercises in a Fitness Club in 2003



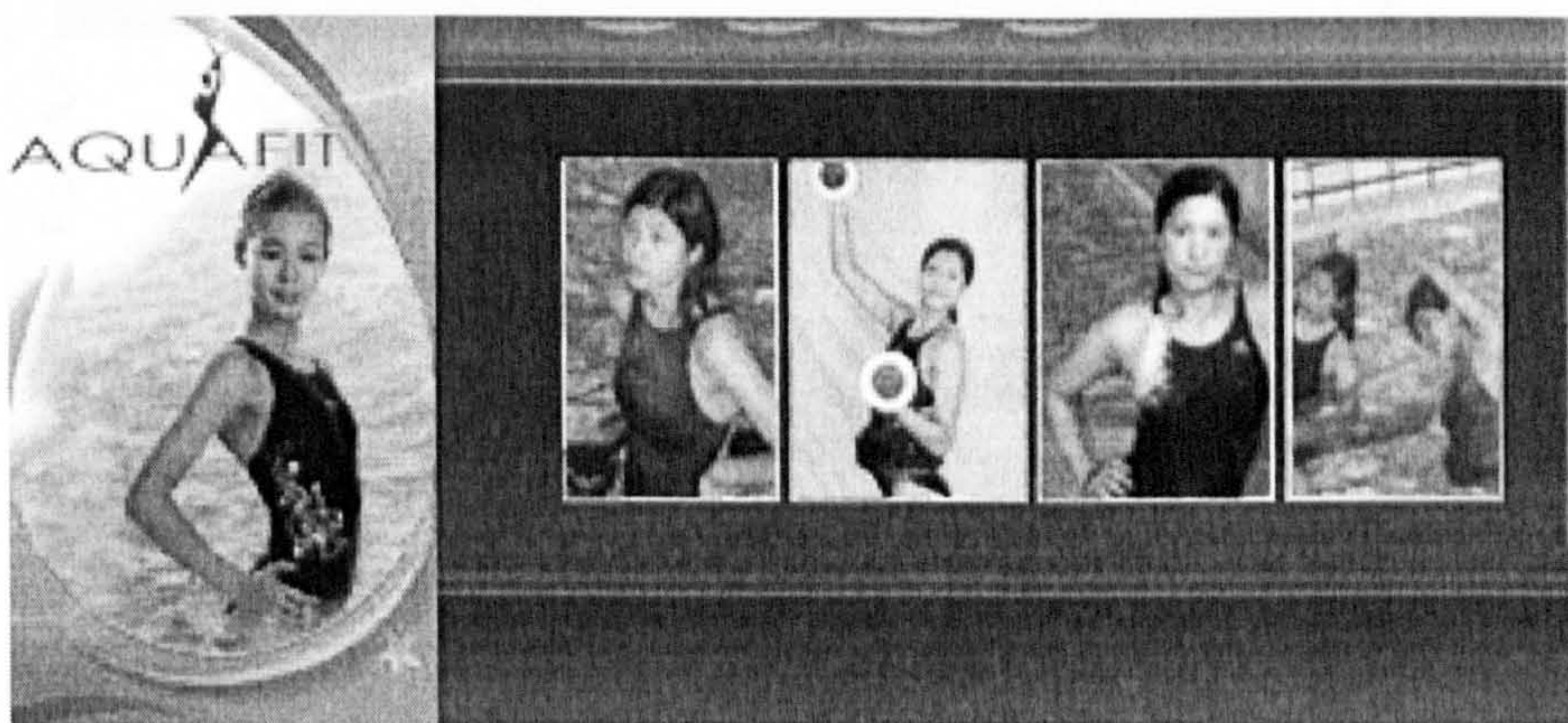
This is a Yoga training course in Bally Fitness Club. All of the exercisers are women.

Source: This photo was taken by the researcher in Bally Fitness Club, Beijing, 2003.

Driven by the market, some women's special fitness clubs have also emerged such as women's *Shebin* clubs, swimming clubs and aqua aerobic clubs. Take the *Aige shuizhong jianshen julebu* (Aqua Fitness Club) for example. It was opened in the most popular commercial district of Beijing in 2005. It has already enrolled many members,

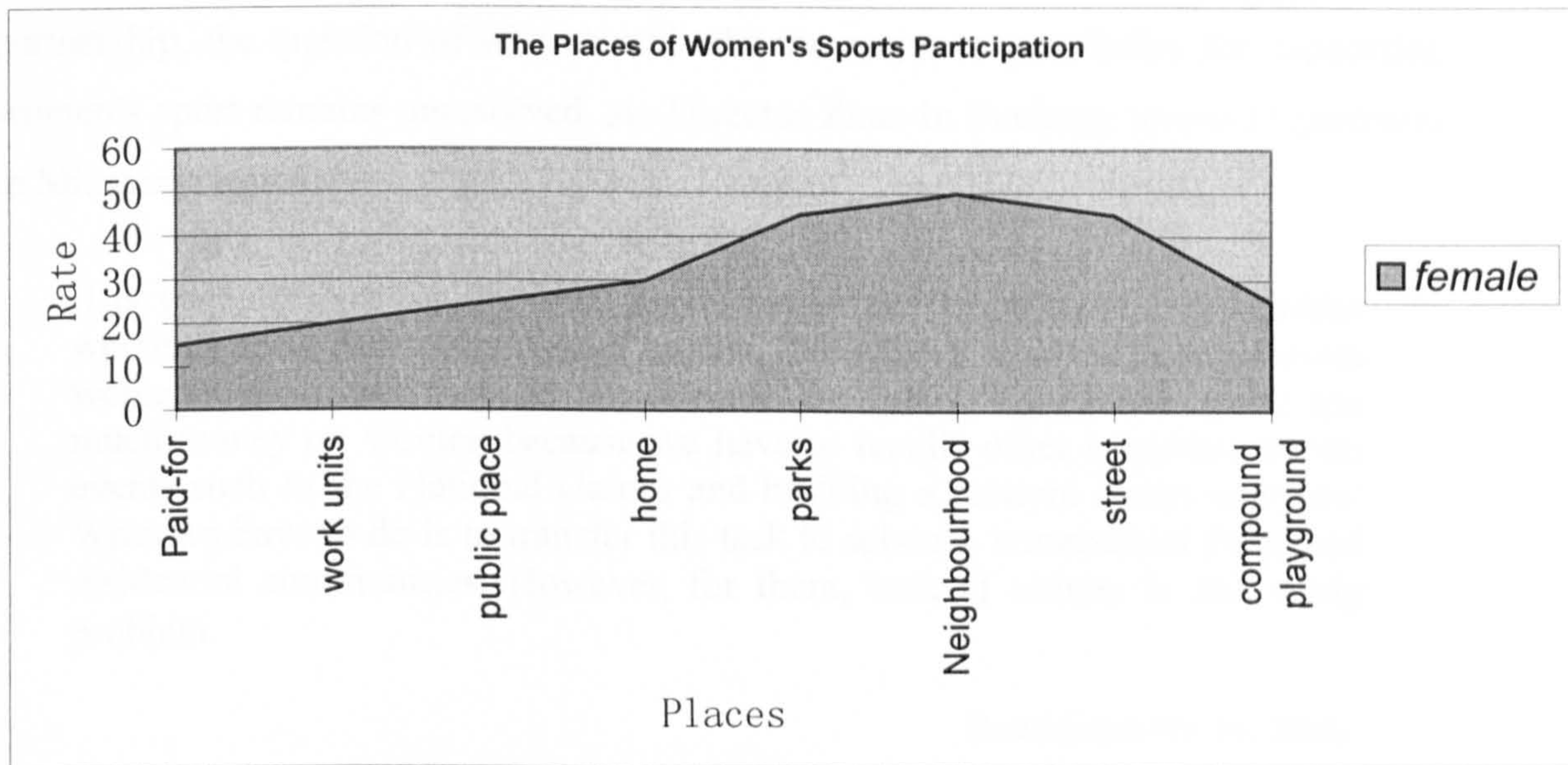
mainly young women. It also has a sister club in Shanghai. Aqua aerobics combines the elements of synchronised and conventional swimming, dancing, aerobics and body-shaping to whatever degree the exercisers prefer. It has been a new fad for women striving to get or stay in shape. Going to professional fitness gyms has been a new fashion in Chinese women's sport.

Picture 6.5 Auqa Aerobics in 2005



Source: AQUA FIT Club in Shanghai, <http://www.aquafit.com.cn/lesson/lesson.htm>..

Urbanisation since the 1980s has resulted in the specialisation of the urban physical structure. The changes of physical structure have contributed to an increased autonomy and diversity in urban spaces. In line with district specialisation, Chinese individuals have gained more choices for their living, working and recreational activities. Urban space, such as residential districts, parks and squares and commercial districts have become centres for women's participation in sports activities. Figure 6.11 demonstrates the main places for women's sport in cities. The construction of residential neighbourhoods was the most 'accessible' space for women to take part in sport because of the convenient location and free facilities. Parks and squares are the most 'popular' spaces for women's sports activities because of their natural and cultural environments and affordability for most Chinese women. Fitness gyms in commercial locations are new spaces in urban areas, which provide middle-income and high-income women with a professional sports environment to build up fitness and enjoy a modern life. While making up for the deficiency of sports grounds, these spaces in cities are convenient for urban women in their daily lives.

Figure 6.11 The Places of Women's Sports Participation

Note: This survey investigated 500 women in big cities; 300 in medium cities; and 200 in small cities

Source: Ma, 1999.

6.7 Limitations on Women's Sport

The post-Mao era has represented a remarkable period in the transformation of women's sport. Chinese women have benefited from increased opportunities and made great progress in sports participation. However, not all changes are for the better. Women's inferiority and gender inequality remain in this transformation and affect the sustainable development of women's sport.

6.7.1 Policy: Inadequate Provision for Women's Sport

In theory, the NFP promoted women's sport widely and intensively; in practice, inadequate provision from the CGAS, local authorities and commercial sectors has restricted this aim (Gu and Li, 2001). Although an amount of money is available to the CGAS each year for mass sport, there are no specific targets or regulations on how much should be spent on women. At present, the CGAS concentrates more on building sports infrastructures and organising big sports events and meetings. They

assign women's sports programmes to the local authorities, the education authorities, enterprises, commercial firms and public organisations. However, within this partnership, the question of who should take the major responsibility for supporting women's sport remains unresolved. As Director Zhao in Fucheng Sports Department in Mianyang stated:

It is very difficult for the local sports authorities to promote and organise women's sport due to the lack of money. The CGAS requires us to promote women's sport, but they do not allocate the funds. We cannot spend too much money on women because we have to handle other important sports events such as the National Games and building a modern sports complex. What we have to do is to transfer this task to schools, commercial firms and residential communities. However, for them, lack of money is still a big problem.

(Interviewee No. 34, 2004)

Besides the government and social funds, in the commercial sectors, funds and sponsorship for women's sport are still lacking. Private providers have indeed invested in high-standard women's fitness clubs, but they are not willing to fund public activities and provide women with cheap sports goods. To make profits, most commercial funds are spent on building luxury sports centres, leisure complexes and establishing sports clubs. Nevertheless, most women could not take advantage of these 'modern' sports. A manager of Mianyang Sports Centre stated:

Few women come to exercise in this sports centre although it is a well equipped place for sport. This new sports centre was funded by the government and commercial investment. I think there are two reasons women do not come to this centre. The first reason is most of sports in the centre are designed for men, such as tennis, volleyball, basketball, football, swimming, badminton and so on. Another reason is that the membership is very expensive and excludable for women. People who can become a member of these associations and play sport in this centre do not only have money, but also have a certain social status. Such as in tennis association, most of members are high-ranking government officials or senior managers of big enterprises.

(Mr Wang, August 2004, Mianyang)

Many sports centres have the same problem. This implies that although the government lays down that sport should be open to all people, the fact is those who control financial resources can use their economic power to organise and sponsor

sport for their own interests (Coakley, 2001: 281). During the transformation, the sports funding system at the central and local level was mostly male-controlled. According to the statistics, in sports authorities, there were more male top sports managers than female ones. For example, in the CGAS, the leadership panel had 10 male members, as against only one female member. In 25 sports management centres, there were 78 male directors as against 11 female directors (Personnel Department of CGAS, 2003). Consequently, sports funding and provision is mainly allocated according to male preferences and to maintain men's values and interests. The government has made insufficient efforts to intervene to alter institutional discrimination against women.

6.7.2 Concepts: Obstructions to Women's Sport

During urbanisation, although women's demands for health, fitness, leisure and consumption have stimulated their desire to participate in sport, they have also met with some obstructions.

Firstly, mass media and commercial sectors have put too much emphasis on female-appropriate fitness and nutrition. They encourage women to participate in some appropriate sport and consistently warn women that excessive sports activities will jeopardise their health. Scientists and nutritionists have also sent a message that a reserve of energy is essential for women's bodies. Therefore they urge women to take part in gentle exercise. This idea has locked women into a fixed concept of female-appropriate sport. It has affected women's experiences in sport. An interviewee said:

I used to take exercises every day. When I read an article about women's health, I knew that I had taken a wrong method of exercising. The scientists recommended women to take part in sport two or three times a week and not more than one hour each time. They said too much exercise would reduce the inner vigour of the body.

(Interviewee No. 1, 2003)

Secondly, although the development of urban life has provided more leisure time and opportunities for people to take part in sport, women's leisure time and activities are inadequate compared to men's. According to a survey in 1998, the most serious

obstacle to women's sport is the lack of time (Ma, 1999). In the interviews, many women complained that their life is concentrated on work, housework, husband and children so that they do not have adequate fixed time to participate in sport. According to the Survey of Time-allocation in Three Cities (Shanghai, Harbin and Tianjing) in 1998, the work times of women were approximate the same as men's; however, time spent on housework was much more than men. This resulted in women having less time than men to be engaged in sports activities (see Table 6.9).

Table 6.9 Time Allocation of Two Genders per Week (Minutes)

	Sex	Work	Housework	Physiological Needs*	Leisure
Weekdays	Male	565.33	64.71	591.34	218.87
	Female	526.19	151.34	600.64	162.11
Weekends	Male	122.30	181.49	660.37	474.51
	Female	146.16	299.74	658.94	334.37
Average per week	Male	438.75	98.08	611.06	291.91
	Female	417.61	193.74	617.30	211.33

*includes time for eating, sleeping and bathing

Source: Wang, 2003, p. 324.

In addition to the leisure time, the traditional ideology of women's appropriate leisure activities still influences their sports participation. Table 6.10 shows, reading, watching TV and shopping are still the major leisure activities among women; men spend more time on social activities and sports activities than women.

Table 6.10 The Imbalance of Leisure-time Allocation per Day between Husband and Wife in Shanghai (Minutes)

Leisure activity	Husband		Wife		Difference
	Time spent	%	Time spent	%	
Reading newspaper	63.68	14.92	42.03	13.34	21.65
Watching TV	117.64	27.56	102.71	35.04	14.93
Listening to radio	21.81	5.11	14.29	4.88	7.52
Shopping	27.23	6.38	37.28	12.72	-10.05
Watching video	17.09	4.00	8.08	2.76	9.01
Sport	20.08	4.70	11.68	3.98	8.40
Playing chess	11.04	2.59	6.15	2.10	4.89
Social activities	40.52	9.49	16.26	5.55	24.26
Chatting	18.65	4.37	13.68	4.67	4.97
Rest	16.26	3.81	9.86	3.36	6.40
Total	426.92	100.00	293.10	100.00	133.82

Source: Wang, 2003, 212.

Thirdly, most sports business and commercial interests focus on men's sport: for example, male football and basketball matches attract more than 75% of all sports investment (Ashton, 2002). Further, the new sports such as tennis, golf, motor race are dominated by men. Although fitness gyms are relatively available to women, many women cannot afford the expense. These factors draw a boundary around sports activities that can be accessed by women.

6.7.3 Form: The Unfinished Process of Women's Sport

Women's sport is spreading in the voluntary sector and it has become a mainly self-organised activity. Women have enjoyed the greatest autonomy in those sports activities. However, when women's demands for sports participation increase, the self-organised sports groups will not be able to meet their further needs (Huang, 2004). At present, several problems are emerging.

The first problem is that there is no formal and fixed place for these sports groups. They often exercise in parks, local neighbourhoods and streets. Sometimes they have to move their locations. For example, in Beijing, *Yangge* groups were banned in

neighbourhoods and streets due to noise pollution and for safety reasons. Most *Yangge* groups now have to exercise in parks or empty grounds with special permission.

The second problem is lack of funding and instructors. The money mainly comes from the participants themselves, few of whom have financial support from local authorities or from local communities. Many groups do not have formal instructors. Lack of funding and instructors has become an increasing problem for sports groups (IRCMS, 1998).

The third problem is that self-organised activities are very simple and unchangeable. They are linked to stereotyped ideas about what women want – *Taiji*, *Yangga* dance, Disco dance and keep-fit exercises are highly favoured. The members have no chance to be offered new sports, so the interests of women in a variety of sports have probably been underestimated.

The fourth problem is that these sports groups seem too discursive, flexible and lacking certain regulations. This has resulted in women's participation being casual and informal without sustainability (COC, 2005).

Some sports experts recommend that the self-organised sports activities should be led by sports associations and clubs and the government and local authorities should give them more financial and institutional support (IRCMS, 1998).

6.7.4 Space: Limited Access for Women's Sport

Since urbanisation, sports grounds and facilities have increased dramatically. By 1995, there were 616,000 sports venues in the whole country (*China Sport Yearbook 1996*). This number was 145 times than the number in the Maoist era. Taking Beijing for example: between 1990 and 1995, the number of sports grounds and facilities rose very quickly (see Table 6.11).

However, women at the grassroots could not fully take advantage of these modern sports facilities. One important reason was that most professional sports venues are not open to the public. According to the IRCMS in 1998, 27.50% were used for

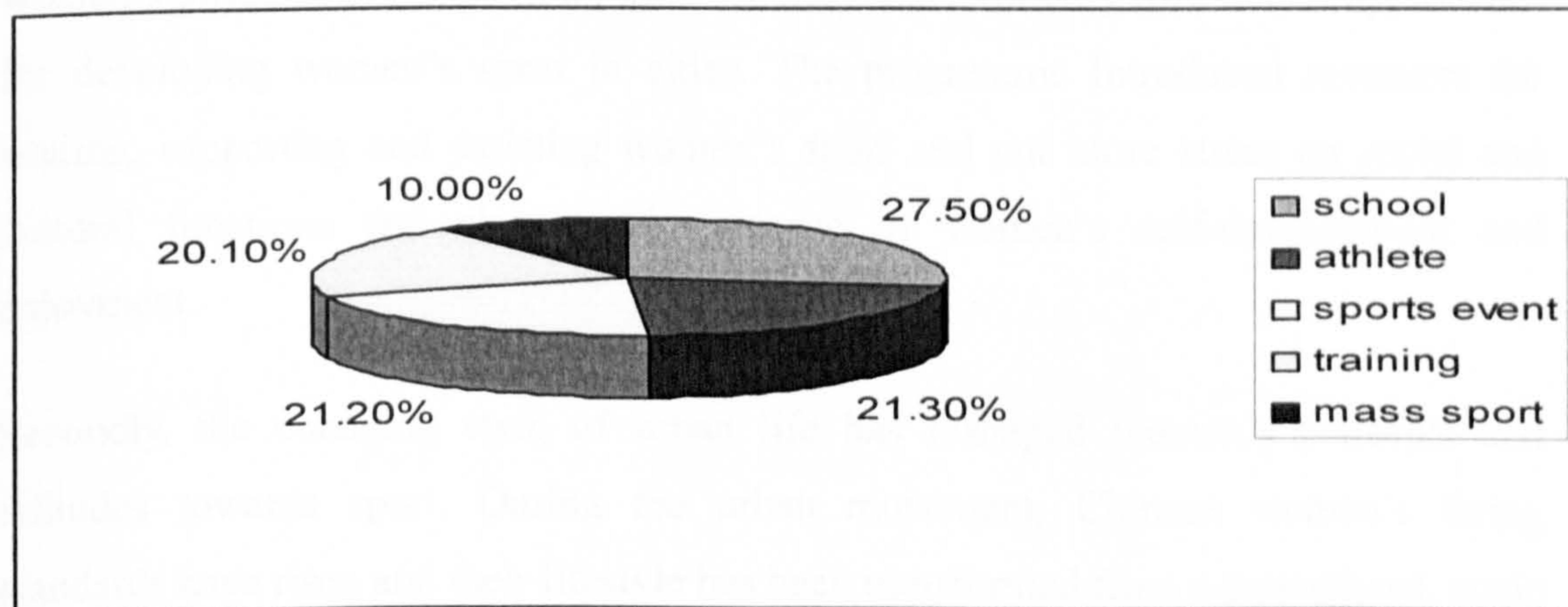
school; 21.30% for athletes; 21.20% for sports events and competitions, 20.10% for sports training and 10.00% for mass sport (see Figure 6.12). Although the NFP required the sports venues to be open to the public with low entrance fees, many sports venues have refused to do so.

Table 6.11 Sports Grounds and Facilities in Beijing by 1995

	1990	1993	1995
Stadiums	20	36	60
Swimming Pools	16	172	162
Training Halls	90	178	253
Outdoor Sports Courts	18	716	729
Basketball/Volleyball Court /Football Pitches	156	5,076	3,201

Source: *Beijing Statistical Yearbook*, 1991; 1994; 1996.

Figure 6.12 The Uses of Sports Grounds and Facilities in Beijing



Beijing Statistical Yearbook, 1991; 1994; 1996.

Another problem was that, in Chinese cities, there has been a tendency to build sports grounds outside cities. According to the *Beijing Statistical Yearbook*, in 1996 there were 4,582 sports venues in total: 636 were located in the urban areas, 2,140 were in suburban areas and 1,806 were in county areas (BSB, 1996). Since most women use public transport or ride bicycles, sports grounds in the suburbs are out of their reach. Therefore, women's sports access is limited.

6.8 Conclusion

Women's participation in sport has been closely associated with the process of Chinese urbanisation since the 1980s. The new pattern of urbanisation under economic reform has been a combination of geographic, demographic, economic, political and cultural transformation. It has also been an essential process in which market-oriented principles in different social institutions have coincided with each other and acted towards modernity. This process has substantially transformed Chinese women's sport at the grassroots within four dimensions: policy, concepts, forms and space.

Firstly, in the process of the vigorous economic and urban reforms, Chinese sports policy for women changed. It aimed to make the Chinese sports system contribute to improving the quality of Chinese women's lives. Therefore, women's mass sport, in contrast to the elite sport, was promoted. The National Fitness Programme (NFP), published in 1995, was a watershed. It rhetorically highlighted the importance of women's physical activities in an urban society and explicitly formulated approaches for developing women's sport in cities. The programme introduced measures for leading, supporting and assisting women's sport and put more stress on social and cultural functions and also the importance of women's self-development and enjoyment.

Secondly, the changing style of urban life has reshaped women's concepts and attitudes towards sport. During the urban movement, Chinese women's living standards have risen and their lifestyle has been transformed from a generalised, static and monotonous pattern into a dynamic, various and diversified lifestyle. This has resulted in a great change in Chinese women's attitudes towards the values of life. In order to raise their living quality both materially and culturally, Chinese women have paid increasing attention to their health, leisure and consumption. The greater demand for sporting activities has stimulated more and more women to come out of their homes and take part in sport. In addition, it has changed women's sports concepts and values. Instead of the winning of political credit for attending sporting events, as occurred in the Maoist era, the driving force for becoming involved in sport has

become the pursuit of a happy life which has spurred the transformation of women's sport.

Thirdly, the transformation of the institutional structure in Chinese urban society has transformed the forms of women's sport at the grassroots. The reduction in the power of the work unit, a hierarchical urban institution, has depoliticised women's social life, redefining the boundary between private and public activities and allowing greater autonomy for women to decide their personal affairs. Accordingly, women's sport activity has appeared as a largely self-organised form. Voluntary organisations have tended to put women's preferences and interests first to arouse women's enthusiasm. Sport is no longer a tortuous and boring activity. Chinese women tend to build sports communities based on their own interests, challenging the male-dominated sports tradition.

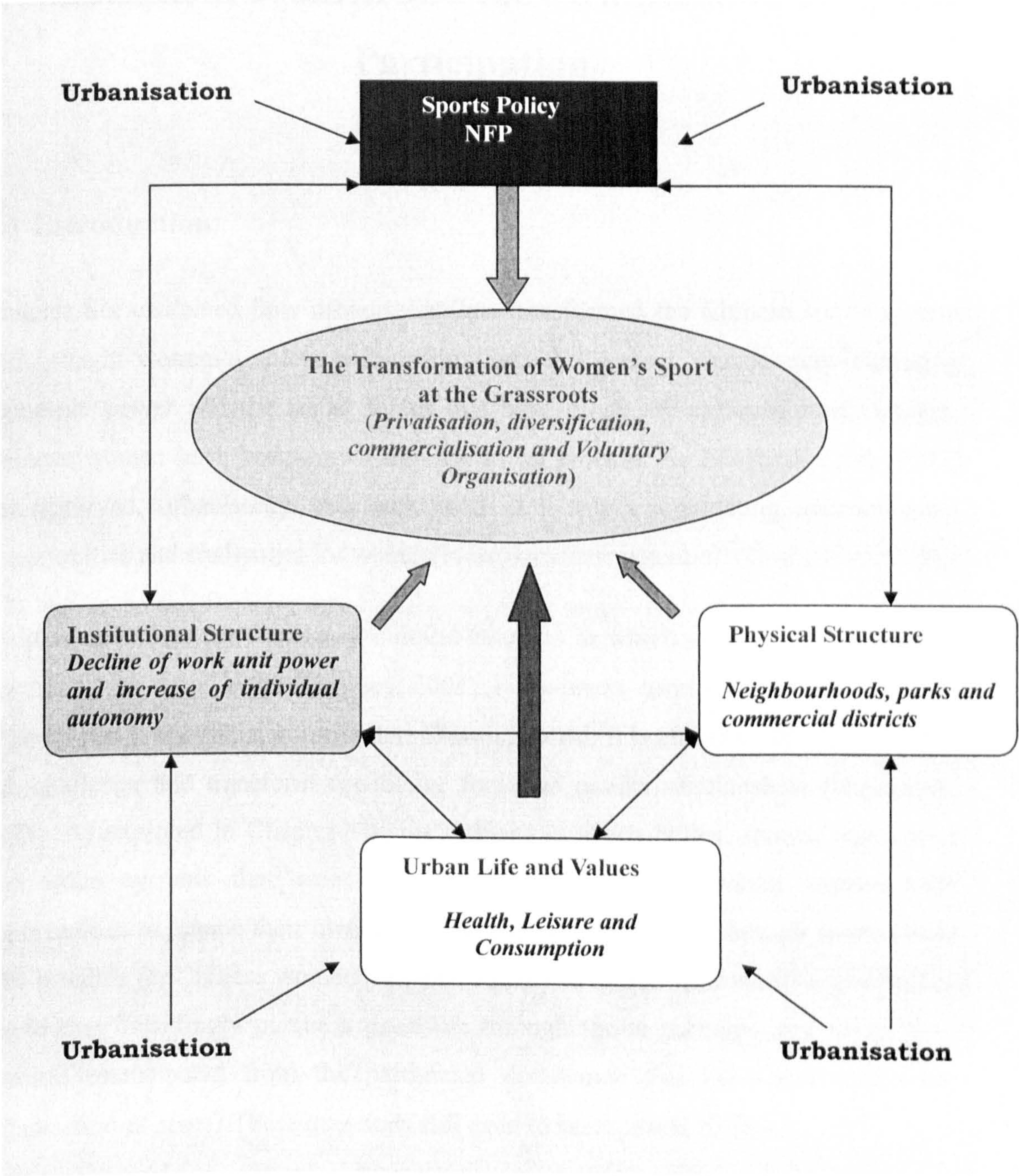
Fourthly, the reconstruction of the Chinese urban physical structure has extended the spaces for women to participate in sport. The separation of residential districts from workplaces, the redevelopment of city central squares and municipal parks for recreation and the booming development of commercial districts have created new spaces for sports activities. They have provided women with expanded means of access to participation in sport, and have made women's sports activities diversified and dynamic.

In conclusion, the changes in urban policy, value systems, the institutional structure and physical structure during urbanisation are deeply interrelated to each other. They constitute an integral force which has systematically influenced women's sport. The sports policy legislated for women's mass sport and took women's own needs into account. Women's own pursuit of a good life has been the driving force. It has stimulated women's demands for sports activities; institutional transformation has been a fundamental precondition, providing a freedom for women to achieve their demands in sport; and the rearrangement of physical structure in the cities was a necessary condition, providing diversified accesses for women to enjoy their sports pursuits. With the integral forces initiated from urbanisation, Chinese women's sport at the grassroots has been transformed by the introduction of privatisation, diversification and commercialisation.

Compared with the Maoist era, Chinese women of the post-Mao era have been emancipated by the state-oriented ideology of sport, gaining the power to make decisions in sport and to introduce sport that satisfies their own needs and purposes. Furthermore, urban development has provided women with a diversified, vivid and relatively free sports climate, not only attracting a large number of women to take part in sport and exercise, but also encouraging women to pursue their own interests and fulfillment through sport. Generally speaking, Chinese women's participation in sport has improved. However, as it is in a developing process, there still exists a limitation in funds, insufficient access and other obstacles in women's sport. First, the absence of specific strategy for women's sports funding and the poor leadership of women has made it hard to achieve equality of participation. Second, the ideological bias concerning women's health, unequal leisure times and a lack of economic capacity for consumption has hindered the development of women's sport. Third, due to these unsolved problems, the self-organised activities of women are loose, discursive and lacking in regulation. These have caused many organisational and administrative problems in practice. Fourth, when an increasing number of sports venues and centres equipped with better facilities have moved out of the cities, most women have not benefited from this development. Women still require sporting opportunities and exercise to be in close proximity to their homes or in the city centres so that access is possible.

Urbanisation has brought Chinese women new practical opportunities for sports participation. However, women from different classes have different social status, expectations and personal needs when they participate in sport. This may be because women's sport is not only the result of a changing sports system but is also embedded in their social interaction – in the economic, educational, domestic and cultural dimensions of their lives. The next chapter will explore how the different situations of Chinese women have shaped the stratification of women's sport.

Figure 6.13 Urbanisation and the Transformation of Women's Sport



Chapter Seven

Urbanisation, Women and the Stratification of Sports Participation

7.1 Introduction

Chapter Six examined how urbanisation has transformed the Chinese sports system and brought women's sports participation into the present. Facing ever-increasing economic power and the social forces that have produced unprecedented changes, Chinese women have been drawn into the social process. As Elisabeth Croll (1995) has observed, urbanisation was welcomed as a new era 'creating unprecedented opportunities and challenges for women to explore their potential' (Croll, 1995: 109).

Sport is related to the social and cultural contexts in which we live. It is a lens for examining the social order (Coakley, 2001). For women, sport has increasingly come to be related to the social construction of womanhood. It is also the site where women can challenge and transform oppressive forms of gender relationships (Hargreaves, 1994). As explored in Chapter Six, the changes in sports policy, spaces, institutions and value systems that went along with urbanisation provided women with opportunities to pursue their own ambitions and seek fulfilment through sport. Could it be possible for Chinese women fully and equally to utilise these sports opportunities? Could they fulfillingly pursue a good life through sports participation? Could they become emancipated from the patriarchal dominance that has characterised the organisation of sport? These questions still need to be explored further.

Jennifer Hargreaves (1994) has suggested that male hegemony occurred automatically in the sports system and was an unquestioned, lived experience, which considerably restricted women's full involvement in sport. Birrell and Theberge (1994) argued that it was the social and cultural conditions that constructed male hegemony and

constrained the meaning of women's sports experiences. This implies that women's interests in and benefits from sport cannot be well satisfied without women's own active awareness of the need for change and animated efforts to become engaged in struggling against the existing social order. Therefore the radical development of women in sports arena requires widespread changes in urban women's role in the public, domestic and cultural spheres.

Generally speaking, since urbanisation, the role of Chinese woman has been changing as a consequence of the advance in women's education, paid work and birth control. Since women are getting better education, living longer and better and having fewer children, they seek other opportunities to bring meaning into their lives (Henderson et al., 1989: 5). This has resulted in an increase in sports activities in women's daily lives. Nevertheless, urbanisation has also affected Chinese women's lives through creating unemployment, gender inequalities, injustice, alienation, fragmentation of kinship and a decrease in shared moral values. Some women with good education have grasped the opportunities of market-oriented urbanisation to develop their economic competence and promote their social status; some with low education have remained working in manual occupations; some are unemployed. This has resulted in the social stratification of Chinese women and their sports participation.

Professor Yan Chijun (2003), an expert in Chinese women's studies, has suggested that during urbanisation, Chinese women have become categorised in three major groups in cities based on their occupation, education, income, manner, style and cultural refinement: they are middle-class, working-class and unemployed women. Middle-class women are well-educated professionals and white-collar workers, mainly working in the corporate decision-making field and management and engaged in intellectual work. They include managers, officers, professionals, small business owners and private entrepreneurs. Their yearly earnings are about RMB 25,000 to 30,000 (US\$ 3,125 to 3,750) or above per capita (*Xinhua News*, March the 26th, 2004). Working-class women include primary-educated blue-collar workers. They work as skilled and semi-skilled manual labourers with yearly earnings of RMB 6,000 to 15,000 (US\$ 750 to 1,875) per capita (Lu, 2002). The unemployed class includes jobless and laid-off women with average pensions or social relief funds under RMB 6,000 (US\$ 750) per year (BSB, 2002).

As Coakley (2001) has argued, sport in the contemporary world grew in urban societies in tandem with an increasing standard of living which allowed people time, opportunity and money to participate in sports activities. In other words, different classes had different economic status, social resources, lifestyles and values, which influenced their sports participation. For women's sport, as socialist feminists argued, it was a dual problem based on inequalities of economic class and institutionalised gender (Costa and Guthrie, 1994). Chinese women from different classes have different economic, educational, domestic and cultural situations, which shape their sports values and patterns of participation. Therefore to understand the variables influencing the sports participation of Chinese women it is necessary to identify their social roles. This chapter will analyse the ways in which sports activities are connected to the economic, domestic, social and cultural aspects of Chinese women's urban lives, causing the stratification of their sports participation.

7.2 Middle-class Women and Their Sports Participation

As discussed earlier, urbanisation has created diverse opportunities for women to be engaged in work (Xiong, 1995a: 18). In the 1990s, the establishment of the market economy system has given women's professional development more opportunities (All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) and National Statistic Bureau (NSB), 2001). *The Report on the Social Status of Women in China* (second issue) in 2001 stated that during the period between 1990 and 2000, women had gained more opportunities to change their jobs and positions in the workplace. Some Chinese women grasped opportunities in the process of urbanisation and their occupational roles have been expanded as entrepreneurs, high-ranking managers, lawyers and financial investors; some women work as officers, administrators, small business owners (ACWF and NSB, 2001). They constitute the middle class in the new urban society.

According to a 2004 report released by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), by 2003, China's middle-class was 19% of the total population (*Xinhua News*, March the 26th, 2004). Chinese middle-class women have found themselves in a society that has become more open-minded and more affluent. They accept higher education and are deeply influenced by Western culture and concepts of life. They are

not particularly interested in politics and tend to be more pleasure-seeking, more pragmatic in pursuing their dreams and enjoying their lives. They are more confident and more independent (Sun, 2005). They define themselves as white-coloured or bourgeois ladies. With their newly-obtained economic opportunities and capabilities, middle-class women have launched a new offensive towards sports participation with strong commercial and consumerist characteristics.

Conspicuous evidence of this phenomenon has been the way that middle-class women have poured into fitness gyms and sports clubs. In 2001, 67% of middle-class women participated in sport frequently; 46% of middle-class women went to fitness gyms or high-standard sports centres; half of them attended aerobics classes in fitness gyms every week (IRCMS II, 2004). These statistics demonstrate middle-class women's economic, educational, domestic and cultural position in the urbanisation era. The following sections will analyse how economic, social, domestic and cultural factors have shaped their sports participation in cities.

7.2.1 Economic Situations and Sports Consumption

The most significant impact that urbanisation has brought to middle-class women has been in changes of occupational status and increases in income. Since these women have entered into the management system and become professional workers, they can earn more money than manual labourers. According to the Beijing Statistics Bureau (BSB) research in 2001, the highest middle-class income in Beijing was up to RMB 50,000 (US\$ 6,250) each year in professional and managerial occupations such as fund managers, IT, high-tech engineers and lawyers (BSB, 2002). This high income is a precondition for sports participation.

With high and stable incomes, middle-class women tend to go to fitness gyms. According to Zhang Lin (2003), the Manager of CSI-Bally Total Fitness Club in Beijing, most female club members are private business owners, joint-venture managers, lawyers, financial analysts and fashion designers. The annual membership fee for fitness gyms, for example in Beijing, ranges from RMB 3,000 to 5,000 (US\$ 375 to 625). These prices are affordable to them. According to the interviews, a chartered accountant of a joint-venture company claimed:

I have a good job in a joint-venture company. I am single. I do not need to carry a big financial burden at the moment. Unlike my male colleagues, I do not drink, smoke or worry about saving money for marriage. I can spend my salary on purchasing clothes, cosmetic products and attending fitness training. Looking fit and beautiful is very important for modern women. So I do not mind spending money on gyms. After all, the club membership fee just costs me a small part of my income. Like an investment, it will pay me back a healthy and beautiful life.

(Interviewee No. 5, 2004)

A self-employed woman stated:

When I worked in a factory, my income was very low. Although I liked participating in sport, I did not have enough money to pay for it. Since I left my factory and started to carry on a small business by myself, my income has increased dramatically. I have bought a car and a flat so far. Compared to my consumption on clothes and cosmetics, a fitness club's fee is reasonable and valuable. It only accounts for 5 per cent of my annual income. I do not think it is a financial burden but is good for health, beauty and relaxation.

(Interviewee No. 2, 2003)

These statements demonstrate that once women have gained the same economic opportunities as men, they are very likely to participate in sport. According to socialist feminists, women's paid work is central to understanding their sports opportunities (Shaw, 1985). The improving occupational status of Chinese middle-class women has been the key to increasing their opportunities for their sports participation and material consumption.

As socialist feminists also recognise, besides economic recourses, social control, namely patriarchy, is also a central concern in women's economic status in sport (Henderson et al, 1996). As mentioned in Chapter Five, the patriarchy of Chinese society was partially a reflection of Confucianism. Chinese women's economic situation in sport was compounded by this ideology (Tsai, 2003). For single women, the Chinese traditional concept of filial piety embodied the notion of financially supporting their parents. Married women, on the other hand, had to financially contribute to their husbands and their husbands' families. Therefore despite the fact that women had an increasing disposable income, they had little autonomy to use it.

Nevertheless, during urbanisation, this situation has gradually changed among Chinese middle-class women. Firstly, the function of the Chinese family has changed. The Chinese family traditionally subscribed to a long-term commitment between parents and children, in which parents raised children with the implicit assumption that children would reciprocate by taking care of them in their old age (Fei, 1998). At present, in the middle-class family, parents have their own stable income which makes them independent. In addition, since the improvement in the welfare and social security system in cities, parents do not need to rely on their daughters financially. Daughters might give a part of their income freely to contribute to the household expenses and show their 'filial piety', but this would not constitute an obligation or a burden. They can freely use the remainder of the money. As a single middle-class girl stated:

I give half of my salary to my mother and she puts it aside for me. I can decide how to use the rest of money. Although sometimes my parents remind me not to squander the money, they do not really interfere in my financial arrangements. I live with my parents, so that I do not worry about expenses on food and housing. I use most of my 'pocket' money on travelling, hiking and going to fitness gyms. I would like to enjoy my single life.

(Interviewee No. 3, 2003)

Secondly, middle-class women's advances in education, work and occupational status and income has meant that husbands and wives have become more equally matched in social status and has eroded traditional gender roles (Liu and Xue, 1987; Pan, 1987). When household income increases in the middle-class family, married women can save money for their own use. In a social survey in 2005,¹ 47.59% of married middle-class women had their own bank accounts. They could spend this money on their own activities without their husbands' permission. As the CASS discovered, the improvements in wives' occupational ranking and income means that they have a greater unrestricted power to distribute their own disposable income; the power to spend money on their own needs has increased (CASS, 1991). As a 36-year-old female club participant, who was a financial analyst, stressed:

I have an independent bank account. I can arrange this money by myself. My husband cannot say anything if I want to spend it on shopping, entertainment

¹ This survey was carried out on China's biggest website www.sina.com.cn in 2005.

or going to the fitness club. Of course, this part of money is excluded from the normal household expenses.

(Interviewee No. 6, 2003)

From the above statements, it would seem that this economic independence is the crucial single element which enables women to satisfy their own personal needs and ambitions. The growing independence of middle-class women owes itself to the financial improvements resulting from job security and wage stability and the loosening of social control. Since middle-class women have gained economic autonomy, they have strong desires and multiple motivations to spend money on sport and exercise. A 25-year-old office manager of a multinational company stated:

Nowadays, participating in fitness club is a fashion. It is much better than going out to eat and drink. Many colleagues of mine are members of different fitness clubs. Joining the club is like buying fashionable dresses. If you have seen a woman wearing a beautiful dress, you probably have the impulse to have one for yourself.

(Interviewee No. 4, 2004)

Another interviewee said:

My friends recommended me to join a fitness club. Firstly, in a fitness club you can get professional sports equipments, supervision and good service. Secondly, you are accompanied by others who are also passionate about keeping fit or losing weight. Thirdly, once I paid the money, I would not want to waste it.

(Interviewee No. 9, 2004)

A high-ranking manager in a multinational company stated:

I keep doing some physical exercises each week. I could not bear to do exercises outdoors. The urban environment in China is terrible. Even in parks, I think the air is not fresh. So many people get together and there is too much CO₂. Some women dance or exercise just besides the street in their neighbourhood. When they are doing exercise, they are breathing in polluted air, which will heavily damage their bodies. I prefer doing exercise in a fitness club.

(Interviewee No. 8, 2003)

The statements above demonstrated that the pursuit of fashion, a healthy life and a

good participating environment constituted the main reasons for middle-class women joining fitness clubs. Apart from these social factors, for some women, the joining of fitness clubs is a symbol of their economic and social status. An interviewee stated:

Those women who can afford the membership fees in fitness gyms, should have a good economic and educational background. Through taking part in physical exercises in fitness clubs, I can make friends with those well-educated ladies with the same outlook as mine.

(Interviewee No. 6, 2003)

Another club member indicated:

Fitness clubs in cities are a real luxury commodity, which can show my quality and social status to others. It increases my self-confidence and self-esteem in a competitive society.

(Interviewee No. 1, 2003)

For them, sport is no longer a simple physical activity, it symbolises a wealthy lifestyle. The purchase of fitness club memberships, expensive equipments and fashionable leisure clothes reflects middle-class women's pursuit of the 'good life'.

Several researchers in Western countries have identified economic constraints as factors that have limited women's sports participation (Green et al., 1990; Dattilo and Murphy, 1991). Based on this research, it has been demonstrated that middle-class women who have achieved high incomes and financial independence have the opportunity and capacity to be engaged in the pursuit of sports participation and consumption. It is not only reflected in the fact that increasing numbers of middle-class women are willing to pay for sport, but is also mirrored in the booming sales of sports commodities especially for women, such as women's private fitness clubs, special training courses, sports equipments, sports costumes and accessories for women. Women's ability to consume sport and sport-related goods is in part a proof of Chinese women's economic successes and individual opportunities in the economic reforms.

7.2.2 Education and Sports Socialisation

If economic conditions are a factor affecting women's opportunities to be involved in sport, women's education was a crucial element in shaping their perceptions of sport (McCrone, 1987). Women's recognition of sport resulted from their experience of sport in childhood. Therefore, the sports socialisation in families and schools is crucial in shaping women's sports habits, building up their sports consciousness and influencing their sports activities. This is also essential in influencing women's sports activity in their future life (Costa and Guthrie, 1994).

Girls' physical education has been particular emphasised by middle-class families. Along with the increasing acceptance by people in urban areas of the one-child policy of the late 1970s and the idea of gender equality, girls and boys have had equal access to education. A middle-class family now treats their daughter the same as a son and is willing to spend money on her intellectual and physical development. In addition, as it was discussed earlier, the parents' perception of children had changed during urbanisation. As Tang Wenfang (2000) has asserted, middle-class parents are beginning to treat their children not as producer goods (that will produce a later return after an initial investment), but also consumer goods (that are simply to be enjoyed now) (Tang and Parish, 2000: 247). This change implies that girls from middle-class families are able to achieve more freedom to enjoy their lives and to expect positive self-development. These changes provide them with access to the process of sports socialisation. As an interviewee described her experience in sport:

When I was five years old, my parents started to send me to learn to swim, play table tennis and play Chinese chess. They believed that sport was very important for me to develop my body and my personality, for example, in building up my self-confidence, self-esteem and ability to face difficulties. They encouraged me to participate in all sports activities but did not want me to be a professional sportswoman. They thought sport was just a part of my life but not the 'iron rice bowl'. From my childhood, I liked sport. Now I still swim and take part in aerobics every week. I enjoy the process of participation.

(Interviewee No. 3, 2003)

The increasing level of education in middle-class women's lives has been another important factor in shaping a positive attitude towards sport and the concept of health. Physical education in China is a compulsory subject from primary school to

universities. Girls in schools and universities receive at least two hours of physical education every week (Hong, 2001b). They are required to attend basic curriculum elements such as walking, running, jumping, throwing and hurling, basic gymnastics, horizontal bar and parallel bars. In high schools and universities, they develop their sports skills in basketball, volleyball, football, swimming, tennis and martial arts (Qu, 1990). In addition to physical education courses, in the primary and middle school girls are also required to take part in spare-time activities. Spare-time sports activities include morning exercises and after-school group exercise, school games and free sport activities. In universities, girls are encouraged to join sports associations and take part in competitions (Qu, 1990).

Middle-class women are normally educated to degree level. Their continuous physical education from primary school to university first, systematically organises their physical exercises; second, helps them to master basic knowledge and skills in physical exercise; third, develops their moral and aesthetic education, cultivates good habits and promotes healthy personalities (Qu, 1990). From the long process of education, middle-class women's sports socialisation will have been well established.

According to the results of the Investigation of Mass Sport in 2000, women who have experienced higher education tend to seek a better quality of life, and they would like to have more leisure time compared to those who have not studied in higher education (IRCMS II, 2005). Higher education is a way in which Chinese women can achieve their independence, ambitions and self-realisation, bringing a considerable change in their attitudes towards sport. According to the interviews in Beijing and Mianyang, many middle-class women not only agreed that sports activities were a way of keeping fit, but also stressed sport's function of developing self-confidence, strength and the spirit of competition. They not only concentrated on improving the quality of their material lives, but also highlighted the improving quality of their mental lives through sports activities. For them, physical exercise was a tool with which it was possible to achieve freedom, independence and enjoyment of life.

7.2.3 Domestic Roles and Sports Activities

The oppression of women in sport is a dual problem based on their economic and domestic constraints (Costa and Guthrie, 1994). This point of view reminds us that besides women's economic situation and educational background, the domestic situation of women is another key element affecting their sports participation.

Since Chinese middle-class women's education, individual capacities and financial contribution to the family have increased, their domestic situation has changed correspondingly. This change has provided them with the possibility of emancipation from domestic restrictions and the freedom to take part in sports activities. As for single women, parental prejudice concerning a daughter's sports activities has been the main obstacle. In traditional Chinese wealthy families, girls' education concentrated on their intellectual abilities such as *Qin, Qi, Shu, Hua* (music, chess, calligraphy and painting). Their sports activities were ignored and even banned as indecent (Raphals, 1998; Wang, 2001d). Daughters had to be obedient to their parents. This situation is changing in middle-class families in urban China. As a 25-year-old interviewee stated:

At the very beginning, my parents were opposed me to go to fitness gym. They said girls should not do too much physical exercise and I should use this time to learn how to cook and do housework in preparation for future married life. My mother always reminded me when she was in my age, she was looking after a whole family. In addition, my parents do not like me to spend too much money on sports expenditure. They wanted me to save money for my marriage. However, I like to be active and I thought I should spend money on what I was interested in. We argued several times, and then they gave up. After all, I had already grown up. I used my own money and I was an individual person. I would like to listen to their advice but did not like the fact that they opposed me.

(Interviewee No. 1, 2003)

This statement illustrates that although there is still a generation gap with regard to sports activities and expenditure, a young middle-class woman can make her own decisions without much parental interference. The virtue of 'filial daughters', which emphasises total obedience to parents, has declined. The daughter's strong insistence on her right to her own values and choice of lifestyle subverts the traditional notion of indisputable parental power. A key reason for this is the younger generation's

advantages in obtaining better education and modern technology. These advantages are essential to modern urban life, where money, social status and individual ability are valued. In the face of these advantages, the older generation's authority has declined. The changes in the relationships and behaviours within Chinese middle-class families have resulted in daughters' obtaining the right to express their opinions and choose to pursue sports activities. An interviewee stated:

I would like to get fit and have fun by doing outdoor sports activities with my male friends. Previously, my parents thought it was not good for their girl to be so active and so close to men. Once we argued very fiercely and I left home to go hiking with my friends. When I came back, my parents and I had a long conversation. My parents said they had only one daughter, they wanted to protect me. However they realised that I had grown up and could make my own decisions. They would not be as much involved in my life as they had before. I loved my parents and I did not want them to be unhappy. I found that if we could have more conversation and communication, there would be fewer misunderstandings.

(Interviewee No. 4, 2004)

This story demonstrates that the development of the Chinese urban society has not only affected young middle-class women, but also changed their parents' perspectives towards their daughters' independence. Although a generation gap still exists in families, parents are more tolerant, accepting and supportive of their daughters' decisions. The family relationship of oppression and obedience between parents and daughters is changing.

As for married women, their situation is more complicated than single women. The traditional Chinese family arrangement is associated with a strongly patrilineal line in residence after marriage (Lang, 1946). When a woman married, she had to live with her husbands' family and under the supervision of her parents-in-law. As Fei Xiaotong (1998) points out, this family structure created patriarchy. During urbanisation, with the development of the economy and the declining birth rate, the traditional Chinese family structure has been subverted. The trend of small families has developed at an accelerated pace. Most couples live in a flat by themselves immediately after marriage. When couples cannot arrange a residence on their own, they live with husband's parents.

The structure of the Chinese family has become a nuclear-type. The proportion of three-member families (husband, wife and one child) has risen continuously. According to a survey in 1991,² 56.75% of urban families were constructed on the three-member pattern (Sha, 1995: 9). One reason for this is that urbanisation has accelerated migration between rural and urban areas and the rise in the number of 'floating' (rootless) people in cities. With more and more young people leaving their birth place, the kinship ties between family members become weak. Another reason, as was mentioned earlier, is that in line with the improving social security system in cities, the function of the family has declined. The traditional concept of living with offspring has changed, because the older generation do not need their children's support. The nuclear family structure has released women from the pressure and the domestic responsibilities of taking care of their in-law families into old age (Sha, 1995).

Besides the external factors generated by changing family structure, middle-class women's self-consciousness is the internal force influencing their reduced obligations to their in-laws. An interviewee stated her story:

I used to live with my in-laws for 3 years, because my husband and I were not ready to buy a flat when we were just married. My in-laws were very conservative. They still believed that women should be obedient, unassuming, timid, reticent and selfless in relation to their families. Now it is the 21st century, everything is changing. There were some conflicts and gaps between us. For example, they went to bed very early and got up early. However, sometimes I had to stay up late for work, so that I could not get up as early as they could. They thought I was very lazy and insisted that I should get up earlier than my husband and prepare breakfast for the whole family. My husband understood me very well. But how could he argue with his parents? They expected too much of me as a good wife and daughter-in-law that I felt very constrained and depressed. I insisted on moving out to rent a flat. Fortunately, I got support from my husband. Now we have moved out. Although we have to spend a great deal of money on the rent, I have more freedom. I did not like getting any pressure from my in-laws. I go to fitness gyms twice a week. Sometimes I can go mountain-hiking with my colleagues. My husband had his own social life. But at weekends, we often go to swim in the sports centre together. In winter we go skiing. Both of us

² This survey was done under Project CPR/90/P06 funded by UNFPA, and aimed to explore women's status in contemporary China, especially their domestic status. It utilised a sample survey conducted in 10 provinces, municipalities or autonomous regions in October 1991.

like sports activities. I am quite happy with my life – free, comfortable and vivid.

(Interviewee No. 9, 2004)

As discussed earlier, middle-class women tend to pursue more freedom and to enjoy their own lives including sports participation. Unlike the daughters-in-law of older generations, middle-class daughters-in-law at present have a good education, higher incomes and better social awareness. They can autonomously decide their own lives. They are also able to fight against social power in families and in society. Their pursuit of sports activities reflects their desire to change their domestic role, their status in society and their cultural norms.

For married women, the responsibility for housework and the home is also the most intransigent feature of gender inequality and a barrier to women's participation in sports activities (Henderson et al, 1996). As Searle and Jackson (1985) have pointed out, lack of time is a constraint for both men and women taking part in sports and recreational activities, but time problems are particularly high for women. Wives are caught in the double-bind of paid work and unpaid housework so that they have less time for leisure than men. According to this research, married women from the middle class complain that the unequal division of housework deprives them of leisure time. However, since they have acquired well-paid work, they can demand that housework should be shared and that they should expect better treatment from their husbands. This situation has enabled them to minimise the obligations of household chores and to increase their leisure times to participate in sports activities. A female manager stated that:

My husband and I both have full time jobs. And we do not have much time to do housework. As for who should be responsible for housework, we argued with each other and blamed each other, which was not like the married life we had dreamed of. He expected me to pay more attention to housework and family affairs. But my husband was only a low-ranking manager; his earnings were not enough to pay our daily expenses. I had to work very hard to earn money so that we could afford the high expense of living in a city. I was very tired when I came home and did not want to do any housework. I needed leisure time to do some exercises to relax my stress and recover my energy. Otherwise, I would fall ill. I told him I would be glad to be a full-time housewife staying at home and serving him if he could earn more money to support the family. He kept silent. As a result, we decided to share the housework and cooking. He did housework on Monday,

Wednesday, Friday and I did it on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Sunday was a break; we could eat out. This reasonable division of housework saves me much time spent on domestic work, so that I have more personal time to attend sports activities and keep healthy.

(Interviewee No. 6, 2003)

According to the survey in 2001, women and men were more likely to share the responsibility for the home in middle-class families than in working-class families (ACWF and NSB, 2001). Besides wives' awareness of the equitability of sharing housework, labour-saving appliances and housework services have to a certain extent reduced urban wives' household burden. This offers them more time to participate in sport. A middle-class wife maintained that:

I'd love to be a good wife; however, it does not mean that I should sacrifice whole my life to my husband. At the beginning of our marriage, I told my husband that I also needed private space and personal time to enjoy my life outside the home. I insisted on employing a part-time housekeeper; she did not cost our income too much but she definitely could help us with the housework. The housekeeper worked 3 hours a day including cooking and cleaning the house. The payment was affordable and valuable. At present, I do not need to hurry back home after work and undertake such boring and endless housework. I can spend much more time in gyms with my friends. When I get home, everything is in order. My husband is content with it. After all he wants me to be happy and healthy so that both of us can enjoy our marriage lives.

(Interviewee No. 8, 2003)

As Parish and Farrer (2000) suggest, the modern city lifestyle might govern the sharing of household labour. However, as socialist feminists have argued, without women's economic independence, this ideal can never be achieved (Jaggar, 1988). The rising power of urban middle-class wives to demand less housework is based on these women's financial independence and their contributions to the family income. When a woman works in a higher-status occupation she is likely to have a higher set of aspirations about equal sharing in household tasks. As a middle-class women stated:

I was fed up with the endless housework. I had been doing all the housework since I married. I wanted to have a change, escaping from the bonds of home, husband and children, so I joined the dancing association and the fitness centres. I found pleasure and fun in dances. I came out every evening after dinner leaving dishwashing, cleaning and other household chores to my husband and my daughter. I found that, without me, they could manage the

housework very well. It seemed that men can be accustomed to doing housework. It is not women's natural responsibility.

(Interviewee No. 10, 2003)

Wearing (1990) indicates that 'the power and resistance in gender relations go hand in hand' (Wearing, 1990: 41). Since the gender relationship is neither static nor one-way, it is always possible to struggle against power and gain some autonomy in each situation (Wearing, 1990). Urbanisation has brought middle-class women changes in occupational and domestic status. These changes have affected the existing gender order in Chinese society. Although the transformation of gender relations and the elimination of patriarchal power seem likely to be a slow process, Chinese middle-class women have become aware of social resistance and they have the ability to achieve this goal. Since sports participation represents urban women's choice and self-determination, it can become an instrument for reconstructing women's status in society.

7.2.4 Shaping Ideal Bodies through Fitness Exercise

The body is a major aspect of feminists' analyses of power relations within a critique of patriarchal society and the transformation of the role of women in the public sphere (Firestone, 1970; Mitchell, 1971; Mackinnon, 1982). Sport has become one of the main arenas in which the body as a cultural artifact is displayed in public (Brownell, 1999), and is a setting within which it is possible to explore the social changes of women and their emancipation movement in male-dominated societies.

According to Foucault (1981), the image of female body was a historical production and primary site for the operation of social power. From a historical perspective, Chinese women's body image has always been the social and cultural product of the changing nature of ideology, power, social structures and cultural system (Hong, 1997: 45). Chinese women's sport is deeply embedded in these body cultures. In the feudal society (before the Maoist era), the Chinese woman's body was forced to act according to the criteria of feminine physical beauty: small, elegant, fragile and gentle; women's physical movement was therefore restricted. In the Maoist era, the Chinese woman's body was required to discard femininity and find expression in the

masculine image; women's physical strength was therefore emphasised in their participation in sport. In the post-Mao era, urbanisation has created a new body culture, which has a powerful impact on women's sports activities. Middle-class women, as the group most sensitive to change in modern culture, were profoundly influenced by this tendency. Their fitness regimes are deeply engaged in this cultural transformation.

In contrast to the gender sameness advocated in the Maoist era, along with China's urbanisation and its entry into global capitalism, the highlighted awareness of gender differences has increased (Yang, 1999). Since the 1980s, much of the advice literature has admitted that physical beauty and personal adornment are important and natural concerns for women. Dressing up is even regarded as a liberating act (Honig and Gail, 1988). This has been the starting point for Chinese women to become interested in paying attention to their appearance. In the 1990s, Chinese women's feminine appearance was reinforced in urban life. There were two reasons for this. The first was that in a market-oriented society, the social expectations of women's appearance and their body image grew enormously. This growth was associated with the 'rice bowl of youth' ³(*qingchun fan*) in China, opposed to the socialist 'iron rice bowl' ⁴(*tie fanwan*). Having a good appearance was an important but hidden criterion in the job market (Lan, 2001). In addition, women's physical appearance was also an important factor in marriage. In modern times, women's physical attractiveness is even more sought after than the internal virtue of women when men seek mates. A beautiful wife can not only satisfy a man's desire for sexuality, but can also symbolise a man's success. Sun Zhongxin, a Chinese feminist, commented that:

In contemporary China, the society requires modern women not only to have independent abilities in work and housework but also to have a good appearance and beautiful figure.

(Sun, 2002)

Another reason for this preoccupation with beauty has been attributed to the influence of Western culture. Since China opened its door to the world, Western culture has poured into Chinese cities. Images of Western women have appeared in all forms of

³ A common term that refers to a woman's ability to convert youth and beauty into potentially lucrative employment opportunities, particularly in the service and entertainment sectors.

⁴ This was once the symbol of guaranteed employment, housing and social services under state socialism.

communication and consequently have influenced Chinese women's views of physical attractiveness. They express complex, radical and sexual attitudes towards women's bodies and appearance. Middle-class women have a strong desire to seize the world's fashion and embrace Western culture. Since the mid-1990s, the Western 'fitness boom' has hit Chinese society like a hurricane. In 10 years, it has had an undeniable impact on the reformation of femininity in cities. The Chinese traditional concept of being thin and fragile and the Communist ideology of being masculine and strong have been challenged by the new image – 'firm but shapely, fit but sexy, strong but thin' (Markula, 1995). An interviewee, a fashion magazine editor, indicated that:

The idea of that 'masculine mother; strong babies' has been subverted. Women nowadays would like to express their femininity and individuality, which were criticised in the past. The ideal female body now was slender and curves with big breasts, small waists, long legs and raised buttocks. The beauty ideal remains slim, gentle but requires a more fit and sexy look.

(Interviewee No. 1, 2003)

Another interviewee stressed:

A proper female look should not be too muscular. This would lose feminine qualities; and it should not be too thin either. This would make them look fragile and lacking power. Modern women should appear healthy, active, happy and sexy. Look at Western sportswomen. They are not slim but fit, not fat but sexy. Chinese women at present always dream of this kind of beautiful figure.

(Interviewee No. 4, 2004)

And another interviewee stated:

Nowadays, a fit, healthy and sexy figure with smooth skin is the new standard by which to evaluate a woman in the modern sense. Beautiful clothes, colourful make-up and different hairstyle can only embody its value when they are properly worn on a proper figure. How ugly you could imagine if a fashion dress is on a baggy body. Big breasts and raised buttocks are the symbol of a youthful spirit, vitality, confidence and modernity. That is what women always pursue in their lives.

(Interviewee No. 5, 2004)

According to the IRCMS II, 67% of middle-class women believe a firm and sexy figure is beautiful (IRCMS II, 2004). They are encouraged to pursue 'the new health

and beauty craze' through fitness exercise. Thus in the late 1990s, women's interest in the beautification of the face and dress was frequently combined with achieving a more attractive and sexy body through exercises.

Based on extensive interviews and participant observations in fitness clubs, it was found that some women worked hard to attain the ideal body – slim, sexy and youthful. The exercisers indicated that they felt increased energy following physical exercise and that they became more self-confident than before. A club participant reported:

Since I had a baby, I put on much weight. I felt I looked ugly. I even had no confidence to go out and met my friends. I really wanted to find my former 'self'. Although I did not like physical exercise, I decided to come and join the club. It is said exercise is the best way to lose weight. I come here every day and keep dancing aerobics. It seems to work for me and I have become more confident.

(Interviewee No. 9, 2004)

According to the research concerning the fitness gym, many women participate in fitness exercises to lose weight rather than to enjoy sport. According to Zhang Jun, the fitness coach in *Xinlida* Fitness Club in Mianyang, some participants go to the club just to lose weight. When they achieve their ideal weight, they stop attending; when they put on weight, they return to the gym (Interview, 2004). Many participants are dissatisfied with their bodies. They complain:

'I am fat and disgusting.'

'My thighs are too big; I cannot wear a mini skirt.'

'I look fatter than my friends; I can't go out with her.'

(Interviews in Beijing, 2003)

The Chinese media constantly imply a strong connection between thinness and sexiness, using beauty products and exercise. These media images consciously or unconsciously deliver a message that thinness was associated with high status, wealth and success. Chinese women internalise this new standard into their own judgements of their bodies. Li Jing, a Chinese famous female TV presenter has stated:

Fat was the natural enemy of women. Being fat nowadays is tantamount to having 'lazy and useless' tattooed on your forehead. A woman who wants to be beautiful, successful and valuable has to be always struggling against this natural enemy and make herself thinner, more confident and much happier.

Quote in the magazine *Hao zhufu* (Good Wife), 2005

Picture 7.1 Image of Chinese Modern Beauty in the 21st Century



This is an advertisement, showing the ideal image of new Chinese women in cities.

As it shows, young beauty is slender and languid, appealing to the romantic and sexual longings of the readers (Evans, 2002: 335).

Source: Baidu Advertisement Picture,⁵ 2005.

Although there is no evidence that happiness and success are directly related to weight, that is the message that is continually emphasised. To shape a beautiful figure through sport and exercise has indeed become middle-class women's 'second skin'. It represents the attractiveness, happiness, wealth, confidence and success of their urban life.

From the analysis above, it is clear that individual women taking fitness exercise have created meanings for themselves. However, as Ann Hall (1996) has reminded us, these meanings might continue to be framed and constructed by the dominant forces in society. According to the study, although continuing individual choices in sport influence the ideal image of middle-class women, this image is also shaped by the particular socio-economic and cultural circumstances of the Chinese cities. At present,

⁵ <http://image.baidu.com/i?ct=503316480&z=112214300&tn=baiduimagedetail&word=广告美女&in=268>.

women's physical attractiveness has been the bargaining power enabling women to have access to resources controlled by men and used principally by men. This has led to women to meet the beauty ideal and reap the associated benefits. Women's appearances remained intertwined with their identities, social successes, economic pursuits and accomplishments. The association between women and appearance has resulted in women being likely to exercise in order to lose weight and change their body shape in an effort to increase their attractiveness to men and to conform to the dominant culture (Markula, 1993). Their sports activity in this context is the part of an attempt to conform to stereotypical images of femininity. The Chinese female body in sport in this sense is therefore a cultural ideology constructed by the male discourse of beauty and in turn maintains male domination in society.

In summary, over the past 20 years from 1980 to 2000, the urban movement has witnessed the growth of a distinctive social group of middle-class women. With high income, good education and open minds, they are leading women's sports participation and sports consumption in a new direction. Economic independence is the precondition for them to become important sport consumers. Education is essential for them to shape their sports attitudes and habits. The increasing power and improving status in the domestic sphere is a significant factor among middle-class women, which partially releases them from patriarchal restrictions. The cultural influences from the West have deeply influenced middle-class women's perceptions concerning femininity. To shape a firm and sexy body has become a new force stimulating the fitness exercise boom in cities. The significance of middle-class women's sport, to certain extent, reflects the fact that Chinese urban women are aware of the use of sport as an instrument to resist the imposed gender-related constraints in economic, educational, domestic and cultural dimensions. They are stylish, ambitious and successful – and have become a new social force leading the country's future. However, their sports activities at present are still framed within the dominant male body culture, which represents male perspectives and power.

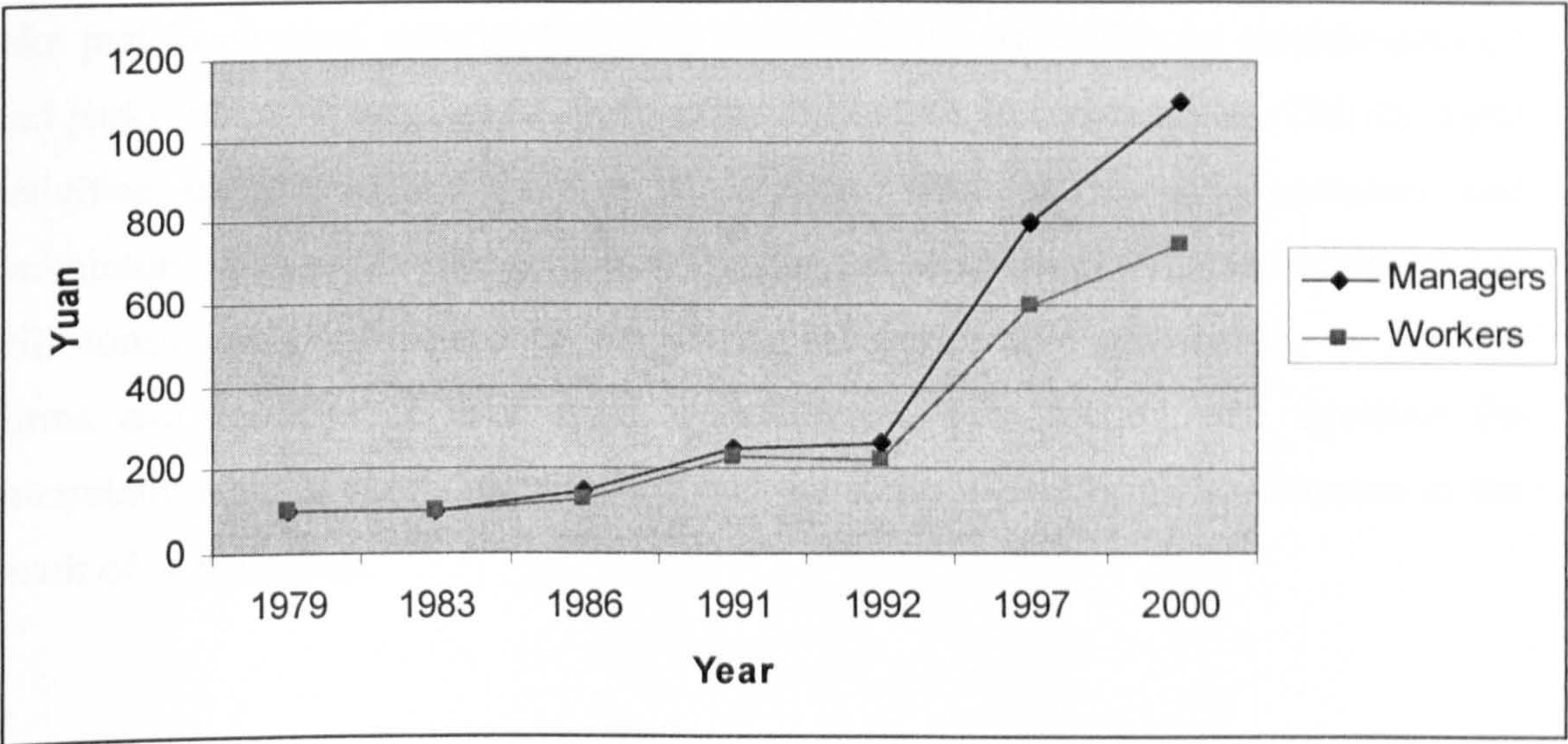
7.3 Working-class Women and Their Sports Participation

If the group of middle-class women are the pioneers leading the new reform of sport in the Chinese cities, working-class women represent another dimension of women's sport with its own ambitions and realities. When the PRC was established in 1949, the CCP announced that the working class was the leading class in the new China. During the reform era, the CCP still maintained that the working class was the principal force driving China towards modernisation (Hu, 2000). However, the fact was that China's market economy brought a decrease in the levels of income, status and power of the working class (CASS, 2000). Urbanisation and social reform had created a middle class with money and power. In contrast, the working class had suffered in this new environment (CASS, 2000; Yan, 2002). Many state-owned factories were closed down and a majority of their workers were made redundant. Privately-owned enterprises gradually became an important force in Chinese industry and the economy. All types of enterprises unabashedly went after profits and squeezed whatever they could from the workers. The enterprise management held absolute power over the employment or dismissal of workers (He, 2003a). A large number of rural migrants meant that workers had to tolerate harsh working conditions and remuneration or lose their jobs to cheaper labours. Government laws were inadequate and were more protective of the managers than of the workers (CASS, 2000). The income gap between the workers and managers has widened. Figure 7.1 shows the average income of workers and managers from 1979 to 2000. The Chinese working class has been confronted by oppression, exploitation and alienation.

Chinese women constitute a large proportion of the working class. In the 1980s, national statistics showed that Chinese women made up 40% of the workforce in the cities (NSB, 1988: 92–114). Figure 7.2 shows that most urban Chinese women were engaged in manual work in service sectors and factories. In the workplace, working-class women were at the bottom of the hierarchical system, receiving low pay, poor conditions and minimal promotion prospects. In the family, they were more accepting of the role of 'Virtue Wife and Good Mother' without significant resistance to patriarchal oppression. In society, they had limited access to capital, education, information and social power. In the cultural dimension, they accepted traditional

values more than modern values. This situation restricted their choices of sports activity.

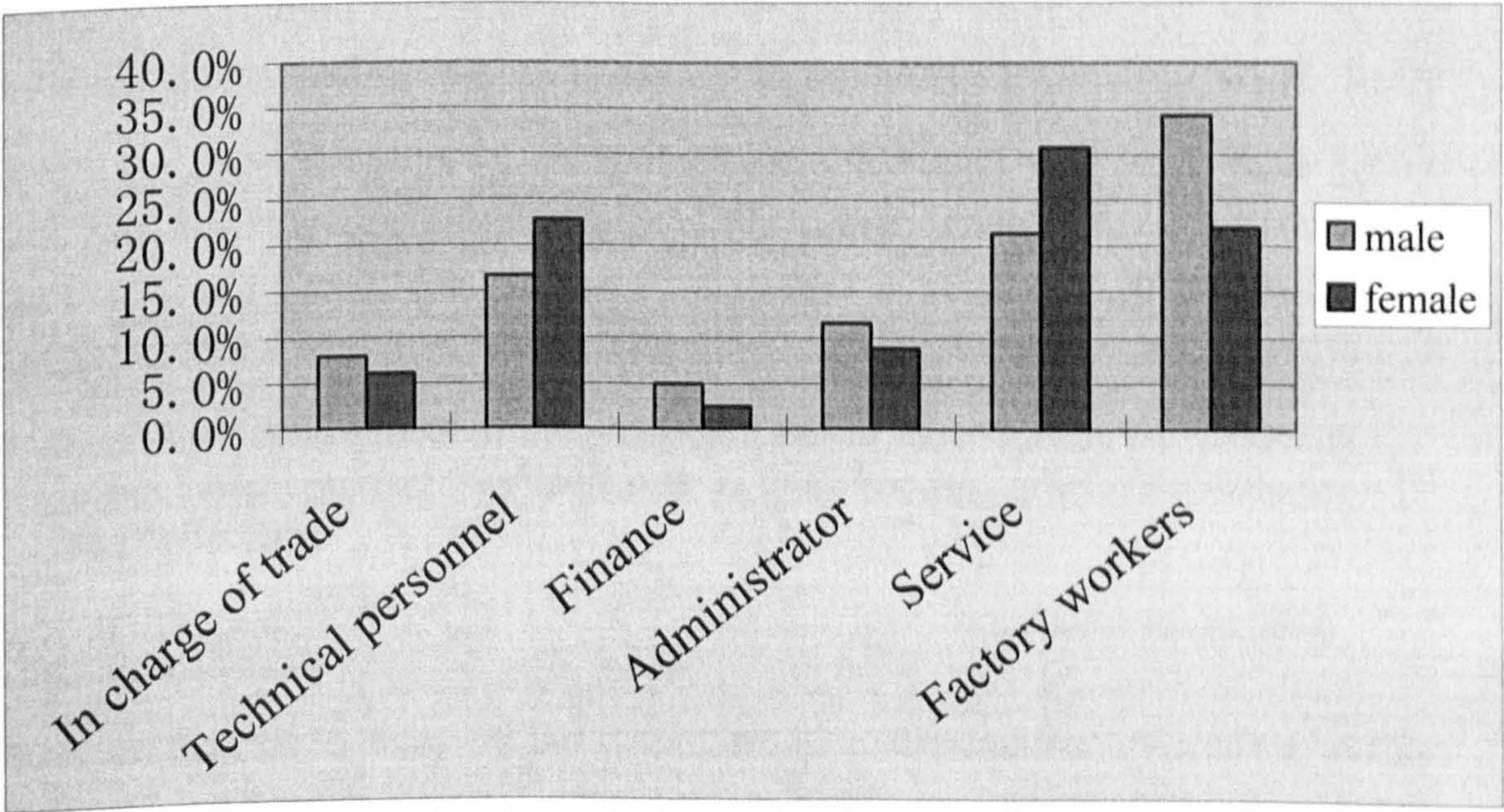
Figure7.1 Changes in the Income of Workers and Managers



Source: ‘Report on the changes of the characteristics and social influences of the Chinese working class’ (CASS, 2000).

Note: income is given as monthly salary. The exchange rate: in the 1980s, 1 US\$ = RMB 5; in 1990s, 1 US\$ = RMB 8.

Figure 7.2 Distribution of Occupations in 2000



Source: Report on the Social Status of Women in China (second issue) conducted by ACWF and NBS, 2001.

According to the research, firstly, many working-class women do not have fixed times to take part in sport. Their sports participation is quite flexible and casual. It normally happens in the evening when they have finished their work and housework. Secondly, they do not usually spend large amounts of money on sports activities. Most of them take part in physical exercise by using what is freely accessible in neighbourhoods and parks. Some of them go to cheap gyms to exercise in communities. Thirdly, their activities are simple and easy to accomplish. Walking, freestyle exercises and badminton are their favorite activities. Fourthly, their sports activity and concepts are still considerably influenced by the patriarchal perspective on women, so that the forms and contents of their sport were limited. This section will examine the interrelationship of sports participation and the status of working-class women as the result of urbanisation.

7.3.1 Economic Situations and Sports Participation

As mentioned, working-class women do not usually go to fitness gyms or spend a large amount of money on sport. The poor economic situation of Chinese working-class women is a key factor. Firstly, their income is low; secondly, there is a lack of financial independence; thirdly, they are influenced by the idea of frugality.

As stated previously, the average income of working-class women in China is RMB 10,000 (1,250 US\$) a year; the average club membership fee is RMB 3,000 (375 US\$) each year. Working-class women cannot afford this price. An interviewee stated:

Going to a fitness gym was too expensive to afford. I earned 1,000 yuan per month. The fitness membership fee normally was up to 250 yuan a month. It accounted for a quarter of my earnings. I had to spend money on something much more important than sport such as food, housing, articles for daily use and childcare.

(Interviewee No. 16, 2004)

Based on the 2000 survey by the CASS, working-class women's spending mainly focuses on necessities such as food, rental, utility bills and childcare (Lu, 2002). Spending money on the cultural consumption of sport is beyond their economic capacity.

In addition to their low incomes, a lack of financial independence also limits working-class women's choices in sporting activities. Unlike middle-class women, working-class single women had to contribute a large portion of their salaries to support their parents, because their parents, who, in general, also belonged to the working-class, had low incomes. Therefore, before marriage, working-class girls accepted the duty of looking after their parents in respect of the traditional Chinese concept of 'filial piety'. Working-class girls often lacked the financial ability to engage in certain types of sport. As an interviewee said:

I do not get high payment from work. My parents were made redundant. I need to give most of my salary to my family. I just have small amount of money in my pocket for daily transportation. Although I would like to do exercise in a fitness gym, I do not have sufficient money to spend on it. I would not complain, because it is reasonable to take care of our parents. They provided me everything until I grew up. It is the time to repay them.

(Interviewee No. 17, 2004)

From this statement, it would seem that compared to middle-class single daughters, working-class daughters have less choice in their lives and they are deeply influenced by traditional ethics.

After marriage, a working-class woman has to provide financially for her husband's parents to fulfil her duty as a good daughter-in-law. Some of them hand their earnings to their husbands. As a result, women lose control over their finances. Although some working-class women handle their household income, they cannot actually use the money for their own needs. As an interviewee said:

My husband indeed hands in a part of his salary to me, because he is not good at managing the family budget. But his income is not enough. My wage will also contribute to food, bills, rental, clothes, children's education and my husband's social life. I have no money left at the end of every month. I want to buy a new pair of sport shoes for exercise, but there is no extra money for me to use.

(Interviewee No. 21, 2003)

This was a typical situation for Chinese women under Confucianism: she allowed her husband to spend money on his social life because he was a man; and did not spend money on her own sports activities because she was a woman (Tsai, 2003).

Confucianism excluded women from having legal rights, property ownership and the freedom to dispose of their own property (Raphals, 1998 and Ebrey, 1990). In the PRC, although gender equality is formally legislated for women, the priority of men remains and influences people's lives. Unfortunately, some Chinese women, especially those with low education, are not aware of this inequality. They take it for granted and use it as a form of 'gender logic'. They believe that men should spend more money than women in terms of social life. Even though some working-class women are aware of the inequality, unlike middle-class women they feel hopeless about changing this situation. As an interviewee stated:

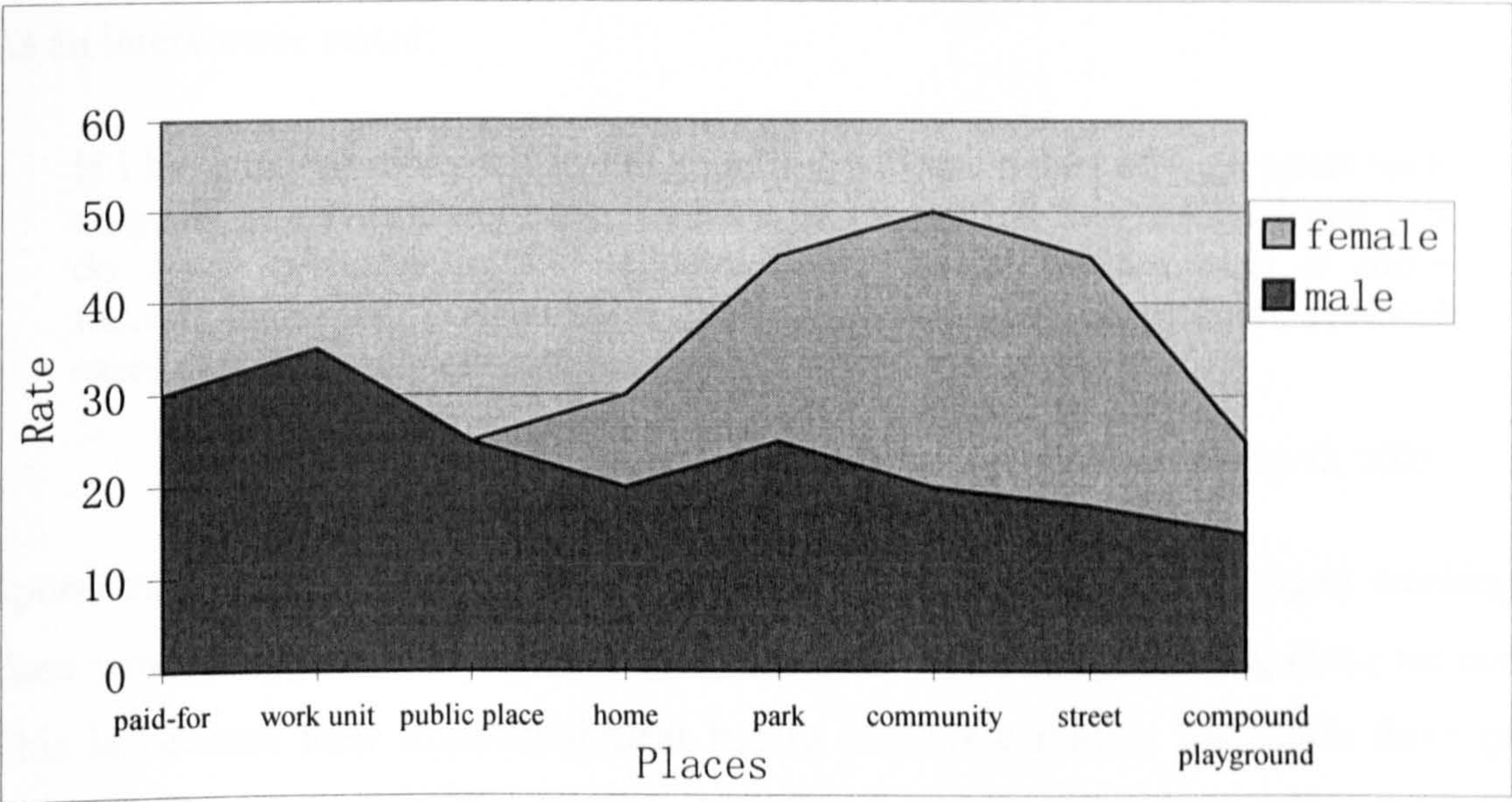
I spend much less money on leisure than my husband does. He has excuses such as that he needs to spend money on sports like tennis to build up relationships with other businessmen, which he thinks will help with his career in future. He desperately wants to change his job in the factory. If I complain, he would be angry with me and think I am not supportive of him and the family. If I demand more money to spend on my sports activities, he will think I am wasting his money, because I earn less money than him. It is unfair. But how can I change it? After all, he is the major breadwinner in the family.

(Interviewee No. 16, 2004)

According to the statistics, in 1999 the average annual income of working-class women in Chinese cities was 7,409.7 yuan (US\$ 892.65), which was only 70.1% of working-class men's wage (ACWF and NSB, 2001). The income gap between the two genders makes working-class women more dependent on their husbands, and women's financial dependence on their husbands restricts the choices in sport that they can make.

Figure 7.3 shows that while most working-class women in the cities tend to do exercise in freely accessible locations such as parks, streets and playgrounds in neighbourhoods (Ma, 1999), most working-class men tend to go to paid-for sports centres and join sports associations. One reason is because of the income gap between working-class women and men. Another reason is the gender bias in sports participation. Men have the privilege of going to proper sports venues and playing sport with other men. Women are not supposed to consume sport as it is unfeminine (Ma Li, Interview, 2003).

Figure 7.3 The Places of Urban Working-class Women’s and Men’s Sports Participation



Source, IIRCMS 1998; Ma, 1999.

Working-class women’s economic constraints in sports consumption are also compounded by the Confucian principle of frugality (Tsai, 2003). The concept of ‘frugality’ was first introduced in *The Four Books for Women*⁶ in 206 BC. It required women to adhere to ‘the ritual norms of the female’ and to ‘bring order to the family’. The emphasis on ‘female virtue’ and ‘female accomplishment’ was considered as a guide for women’s standards of frugality. Although the Confucian doctrine has been criticised in the PRC, frugality as a ‘female virtue’ remains the ideal standard that Chinese women are expected to achieve. As discussed earlier, working-class women are more thoroughly influenced by traditional culture than are middle-class women. Most working-class women interviewed in this research appeared to be affected by the concept of frugality. Even though they had extra money, they were not willing to spend it on sports activities. One interviewee said:

I’d liked to participate in sports activities. However I did not think it was worthy of me to spend money on sport. Frugality is even more important in daily life. If sport required me to spend money, I would not take part in it.

(Interviewee No. 11, 2003)

⁶ It includes four texts and came out in the Han (206 BC-220 AD) to late Ming period (1368-1644 AD). They were a form of educational material for women and were entitled *The Admonitions for Women*; *The Women’s Analects*; *The Domestic Lessons*; and *The Sketch of a Model for Women*.

For some working-class women, although they are aware that spending money on physical exercise is necessary to keep fit, they believe that it is not as important as other living expenses such as eating, clothing, housing, transportation and education. As an interviewee stated:

If I have extra money left in this month, I will use a part of it on sport such as going to a swimming pool; if I have no money left this month, I will just do some exercises in the neighbourhood. Sports consumption is more flexible than other consumption like food, housing, transportation, medical cares and children's education.

(Interviewee No. 12, 2003)

Sports expense is a low priority in working women's lives. Middle-aged working-class women appear to be more frugally minded than young working-class women. This is because their impoverishment before economic reform has made them get used to a frugal way of life. Though their living standards are improving, they still maintained their frugal attitudes towards life. As a middle-aged woman said:

Frugality is Chinese women's traditional virtue. Although the living standards are improving, we have to remember this rule of life. A Chinese old saying teaches us money should be used at the tip of a blade. This always reminds me how to use the money properly and economically. I will not spend much money on fitness gyms, because I can choose some cheap way to take part in sport.

(Interviewee No. 12, 2003)

In addition, unlike middle-class women, who tend to spend money on enjoying themselves and seeking to satisfy their own ambitions, working-class women prefer to save their money for their children and their old age. An interviewee stated:

I have to save money for my son's education. In addition, I have to save money for my retirement. When my son graduates from the college and gets a job, I may consider spending money on my leisure life.

(Interviewee No. 21, 2004)

From the evidence above, it would seem that working-class women's traditional consumer concepts are an obstacle to their sports consumption. Although they have a strong desire to take part in physical exercise to raise their quality of life; they are unable or unwilling to spend too much money on it. As a result, working-class women

tend to use every convenient space in cities to do their physical exercise. An interviewee stated:

We can utilise every place to do sport and exercise. The professional fitness gyms are good places, but not necessary. We can exercise our bodies anywhere without spending too much money. The outcomes are the same, to keep fit. To do exercises in the playground of neighbourhood is a cheaper and suitable way for low-income women to take part in sport.

(Interviewee No. 11, 2003)

Another working-class woman commented:

The rich people have their way to do sport while the poor have their way. I just spent 20 yuan on badminton rackets. I can use them at least for a year.

(Interviewee No. 12, 2003)

These concepts of frugality among working-class women are also closely associated with their experiences during the social reforms. As mentioned earlier, the transformation of Chinese society since the 1980s has redefined the social contract that the government has with the people (Tang and Parish, 2000). Before the 1980s, the government promised equality, job security, basic living standards and social welfare. Working-class women did not need to worry about their living expenses and retirement. However, since the transformation, the ideal of egalitarianism, security of jobs and other benefits for the working class has been abandoned. There is no free medical care or free childcare; they have to buy their houses and provide social insurance for themselves. These changes have made many working-class women feel stressful about their lives. They are persuaded that to save money and to control expenditure is necessary for their peace of mind.

Through this analysis of the economic factors affecting working-class women in sport, it can be seen that it is the trend towards capitalism and the influence of Chinese patriarchy that have reacted with each other and have resulted in their limitation in sport. Firstly, Chinese economic reform and urbanisation has caused a stratification of society, with working-class women moved from the centre to the margins of society. They have fewer resources to achieve the opportunities brought by the development of modern sport. Secondly, the decline of their social status has made working-class

women more financially dependent on their husbands at home and more submissive to their patriarchal power. This has restricted equality of opportunity between women and men for participation in sports activities.

7.3.2 Education and Sports Socialisation

Similar to the influences prevalent with the middle class, the education of working-class women is an important factor in shaping their sports attitudes and opportunities. However, based on different family backgrounds and resources in society, the education of working-class women does not always seem to have a positive influence on their sporting activities.

Although the implementation of the one-child policy in the late 1970s has made parents in cities invest in their own children regardless of whether they were boys or girls, working-class girls gained less attention than middle-class girls and working-class boys. Working-class girls' physical education was accordingly ignored by their parents. This phenomenon has firstly a financial reason. As a working-class mother said:

My husband and I are both workers. We do not have a family budget for our daughter's physical activities such as sending her to swimming or table tennis lessons. My daughter likes doing sport. I bought badminton rackets so that we can play the game in the open space in the neighbourhood sometimes. We do not need to pay for it. My daughter still can play sport. I do not think a girl needs professional physical training. I guess she just plays for fun.

(Interviewee No. 18, 2004)

Besides economic reasons, the research has found that the educational bias of working-class parents is another key factor that influences girls' involvement in sport. Compared to middle-class parents, working-class parents value more their daughters' success in career or marriage as an element in improving their social status. Nevertheless, based on Chinese traditional ideas, girls' physical capabilities (except successful athletes) do not play a part in building up their future careers and marriage. This is because in the Chinese educational system, intellectual capability is the only standard for evaluating children's abilities. This determines whether a child will have

a chance to attain higher education and eventually gain a decent job. An interviewee remembered that when she was a child, her mother often said to her 'clumsy birds have to fly early' and encouraged her to study hard and surpass boys in school examinations. Her mother was very unhappy when she played games with boys (Interviewee No. 18).

An article written in *Zhongguo Funv* [Chinese Women] in 1985 drew attention to parental responsibilities for girls' socialisation:

People often sigh at the feelings of inferiority of some grown women and blame them for lacking self-confidence. It never occurs to them that much of this sense of inferiority is formed in childhood. This is mainly because parents do not understand how to cultivate a girl's self-confidence. So, in order to train strong self-confident women appropriate to a new era, it is necessary to begin in childhood.'

(*Zhongguo Funv* [Chinese Women], April 1985, p. 34)

Some middle-class parents have become conscious of the importance of fostering the self-confidence of girls and encourage them to participate in outdoor activities. However, for most working-class parents, the emphasis on girls' intellectual capabilities has reduced the importance of the girls' natural desire for physical activities. An interviewee said:

I remembered when I was in a primary school, I was good at sport. I was selected for the track-and-field team of the school. I won several medals in the primary school games of our district. However when I entered middle school, my parents stopped me joining in the school's sports team because I would have to spend time training after school. They believed intellectual qualities were more important for my career. From then on, I had few chances to take part in sport. My enthusiasm for sport decreased.

(Interviewee No. 19, 2004)

Parents pay great attention to their children's competence and career; however, their interest in their offspring's education is more for the honour of family than the benefit of the children (Zhu, 1999: 233). Therefore, physical education as an approach to gaining self-confidence, independence, creativity, initiative and other desirable mental and psychological characteristics is excluded from their attention to their daughters' education.

As discussed earlier, education is an important factor in influencing women's sport. From primary school to university, physical education is a compulsory subject and plays an important role in promoting girls' sports participation. Working-class women normally engage in work after middle school.⁷ As discussed earlier, the primary and middle school only provide basic sports skills and knowledge; higher schools and university provide more specific sports skills. Since the working-class girls leave school earlier, they have no chance of developing their physical education and of playing sport. According to IRCMS in 1998, 13% of working-class women (compared to 5% of middle-class women) acknowledged that lack of sports knowledge and skills was an important obstacle to participation in sport (Ma, 1999). As a working-class woman stated:

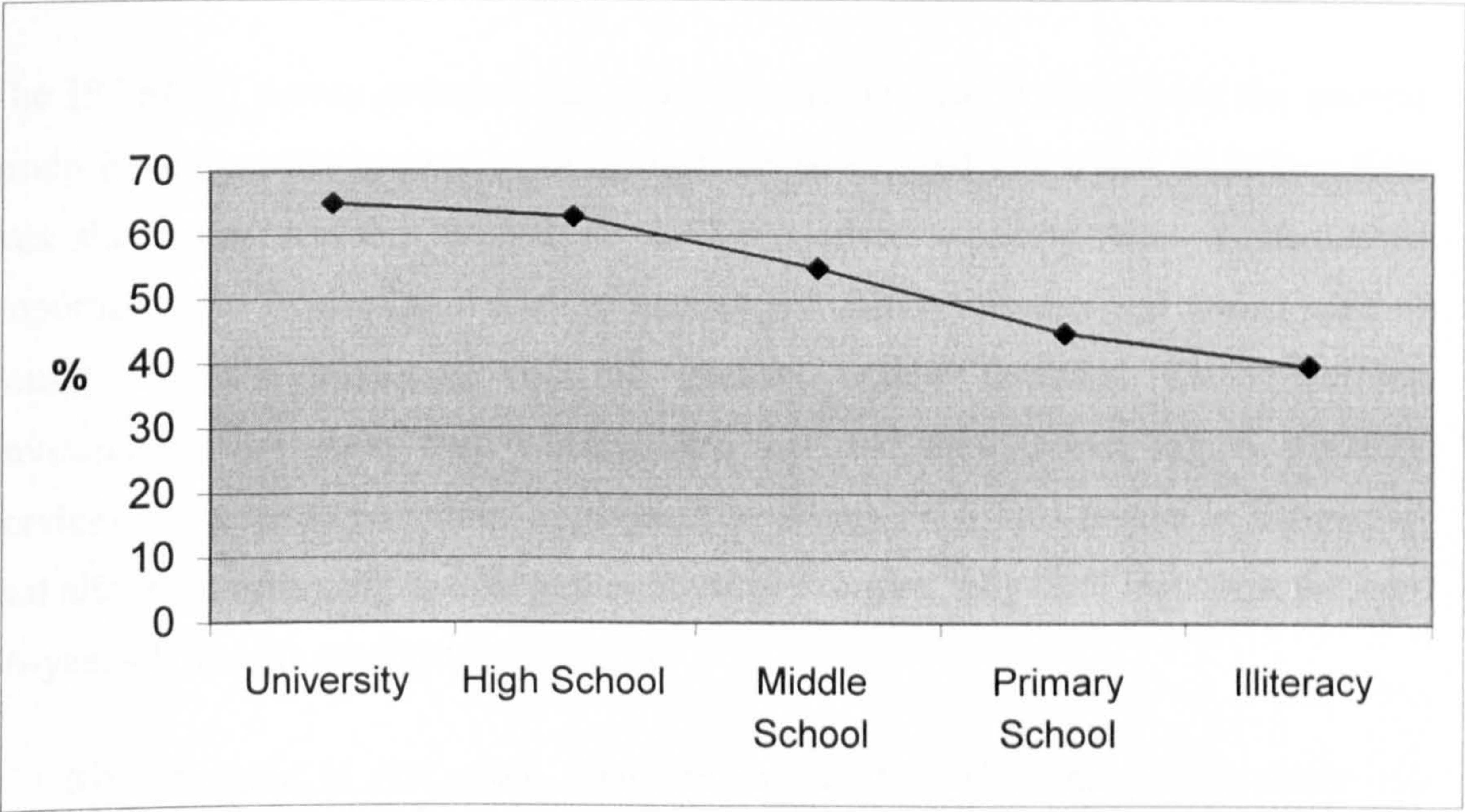
I started to work when I completed junior-middle schools. My family needed me to earn money so as to contribute to the household expenses. I would like to swim. However, I did not learn how to swim when I was a child. Now I have no courage to learn it any more. I could only choose some simple physical exercises such as jogging.

(Interviewee No. 17, 2004)

In women's sport, education affects participation not only through its influence on women's sports skills and knowledge, but also in their sports awareness and interests. When working-class girls engage in work, they do not have enough time to take part in sport regularly, so their interests in sport decline. IRCMS II reported that 30% of working-class women (compared to 18% of middle-class women) thought that their lack of interest in sport was the most important factor influencing their participation in sport (IRCMS II, 2005). Low education is an important factor causing a lack of interest in sport. The report by IRCMS shows that the education level of Chinese women is linked to the rate of sports participation (See Figure 7.4).

⁷ In the Chinese educational system, primary education and middle education are funded by the government. Higher education for children has to be funded by parents. Along with the reforms, high school and university tuition fees have increased substantially, and many working-class families cannot afford them. Since parents expect quick returns for their investment in daughters before the daughters are married off, many working-class girls stop their education at middle school.

Figure 7.4 Education and Women’s Sports Participation



Source: IRCMS, 1998 and Ma, 1999.

7.3.3 Domestic Roles and Sports Activities

Women’s sports experiences are associated with their social roles (Costa & Guthrie, 1994). This suggests that it is crucial to clarify women’s specific social role and their key functions in society in order to understand the factors that influence their participation in sport.

Working-class women’s double roles in the workplace and in the home are the key to analysing their sports participation in contemporary China. As argued previously, since the founding of the PRC, Chinese women have been brought into social production and involved widely in the labour force. As Jean Robinson (1985) argued, ‘in Chinese policy there was an implicit assumption that women had two major roles to fulfill: that of mother and of worker’ (Robinson, 1985: 33). In the process of urbanisation since the 1980s, Chinese women’s double roles still exist in urban society. This burden is greatest among working-class women. A recent sample survey, conducted by *Huakun* Female Survey Centre in 2003, showed 94% Chinese working-class women felt their lives were under pressure from economic burdens, conflicts between their job and family life, problems in their marriage and children’s education

and health (*People's Daily*, March the 8th, 2003). The pressure on working-class women is embodied in their lack of sports participation.

The IRCMS II survey revealed that married working-class women were the poorest group in sports participation. Most of them acknowledged that a lack of leisure time was the major reason (IRCMS II, 2005). Married working-class women have important roles in earning money to supplement family income and taking care of young children, husbands and old parents within families. Their working environments are poor, their earnings are low and they cannot afford domestic services and have to undertake housework by themselves. This results in a situation that although some want to take part in physical exercise, they have little time for it. A 36-year-old female worker told her story:

My physique is not good; therefore my doctor asked me to do some exercises every day. I used to try to get up at six o'clock and go to the park near my home. I did one-hour exercises and then returned home. It was half past seven. I rushed my breakfast and went to the factory. It was already 8:30. I had no time for a break and went straight to work. I felt tired the whole day standing by the machine. So I gave up doing exercises in the morning and tried to do them in the evening. However, I still found it difficult. When I finished work and came back home, I had to cook and do some housework. When I finished all my work, I was too tired to move. I felt exhausted after a whole day's work in the factory and home, having no energy to do any physical activities again. Now I try walking to my workplace. It is said that walking is the best exercise. It might take me half an hour to get there, so I can have one hour at least of exercise every day. That is possibly the best way for me to exercise.

(Interviewee No. 13, 2003)

Another new situation is that since the 1980s employers no longer accept responsibility for supporting both male and female employees' participation in sport (Gu and Li, 2001). Although some workplaces run some sports activities or games after work or in the holidays, these sports activities are not available to female workers. A female worker said:

There are indeed some sports activities after work time or at weekends. However, many women are unable to join these activities. Men can participate, because most of them do not need to hurry home to pick up

children and cook. We have to go to home after work. Who can help us to feed our family if we stay longer after work? Therefore, after-work is a time for working men's leisure but not for working women's.

(Interviewee No. 16, 2004)

In addition to the situation of the double burdens, working-class women are not completely released from the historical patriarchal arrangement and Confucian ideology in the domestic sphere. As Parish and Farrer (2000) note, the family is not only a social institution, but also an ideological system to maintain social order and gender relationships. Since members of both sexes are heirs of a common culture and shared assumptions about sex and gender characteristics, changes of ideology occur neither easily nor rapidly. Although in contemporary China, family structure, function and relationships are changing, being a good wife and loving mother still dominates most people's ideas about what women should be. Working-class women are more tolerant of this conservative idea than middle-class women because of their economic, educational and social background. This results in the fact that most Chinese working-class women feel themselves consciously or unconsciously being constrained by societies' traditional expectation towards women.

As for the right to go out to participate in sport, there remains a conceptual gap between working-class men and women. As Hargreaves (1994) has pointed out, men's labour outside the home is highly valued, so men have the right to engage freely in leisure activities so that they can return fresh to their jobs. In contrast, women's labour, including child-care, is done at home and though physically demanding, time-consuming and socially essential, is valued less. China has the same problem. The unequal division of labour and its unfair evaluation system to a large extent dictates gender differences in sports participation. An interviewee told her story:

Although my husband went out to play chess every day, he did not like me to go out to dance with my friends in the playground. I wondered why he could have leisure activities every day, but I could not. He said he was tired due to working the whole day and he needed time for relaxation. But who cares about my relaxation? We argued many times about this. I told him, if he wanted me to stay at home, he would not go out everyday to play chess. He thought I just wanted to make trouble deliberately. I was so angry that I went back to stay in my parents' home. My mother-in-law phoned me and explained that my husband worked very hard and he needed a careful and thoughtful wife to support him. They wanted me to return home and to

apologise. My parents also pursued me to return home. They said a wife should be more tolerant of her husband so that a harmonious family could be maintained. They also thought for women, staying at home and watching TV was also a way of leisure instead of going out. But why do men need to go out? It is believed that their going out to participate in sports and leisure activities is social lives, which is necessary and important for their career.

(Interviewee No. 27, 2004)

The gender bias towards women's and men's sports activities is a powerful factor restricting women's pursuit of sports participation. Facing patriarchal power, some women accept the traditional moral standards of family life and domestic responsibilities. An interviewee explained why she stopped participating in sports activities:

Since I married, I recognised that I was a married woman so I had to be busy with household chores. Especially, when I had a child, looking after her was my duty. I felt guilty of going out unless I took her with me. I could not forget my duty and seek my own pleasure; I would feel it was immoral.

(Interviewee No. 15, 2003)

Another middle-aged woman described her situation:

Money, work, housework, husband and child constitute the centre of my life. I cannot put this stuff aside and enjoy my personal leisure life. I think for women at my age, personal pleasure is not important. A harmonious and healthy family is the most important.

(Interviewee No. 18, 2004)

According to IRCMS II in 2001, 67% of working-class women thought if they went out to take part in sports activities and did not accompany their children and husband, they would feel guilty (IRCMS, 2005). Besides domestic duty, this study also found that husbands' attitudes deeply influenced women's sports behaviours. As an interviewee told her story:

My health was not very good. The doctor let me take part in exercises frequently. After being introduced by my friends, I attended a dancing group. However, my husband was not happy with me joining the dance because it was a mixed-gender activity. Although he did not say anything, I could see it from his unhappy face when I finished dancing. On my birthday last year, he bought me a workout machine. It was very expensive for a working-class family like us. It cost him two months' salary. But my husband said it was

worth doing it. He said that from then on I could not go out to do exercises. Instead, I could do it at home anytime. I did not know if I should appreciate him or not. I knew the real purpose of his buying this exercise machine for me was to prevent me from dancing with other men and to make me stay at home. Anyhow, I accepted it and never went back to the dancing association again. I thought the family was the most important for me and I really did not want to hurt the relationship with my husband.

(Interviewee No. 20, 2004)

This story indicates the husband's conservative concept towards women's sport. To the husband, the wife's sporting activities were not the thing to worry about; how she participated in sport was the point. A man would be supportive if his wife took physical exercises 'properly'. However he tended to oppose his wife's sports activities or physical exercises in a mixed gender environment. Unfortunately, faced with their husbands' attitude, many working-class women tend to give in to show their loyalty to their families. The women's role within the family results in more married working-class women than men preferring to share leisure time and sports games with their children and spouses than in spending it individually (Ma, 1999). A wife stated:

I could not imagine having my own leisure time. I could only picture myself sharing leisure time with my family or accompanying my child to some sports exercise. I usually spend weekends in the parks playing games with my daughter because I like my daughter to enjoy a healthier environment outside and have a happy and colourful childhood.

(Interviewee No. 15, 2003)

According to 1998 statistics, 40% of women participated in sports activities for the sake of their children or to maintain a harmonious atmosphere within the family, and working-class women were the highest group (Ma, 1999).

Sport has the potential for self-enhancement and self-development, but not unrestrainedly so. According to Kelly (1983), forms and styles of sport and leisure are not just combinations of activities, but are a stage on which people present their identities and receive feedback on their role identities (Kelly, 1983: 93). Women's individual (or so-called autonomous) sports can be seen as activities over which the individual has control and feels the freedom to do whatever she wishes. In addition, it might include an expression of self and a determination to do something for oneself that reflects personal interest rather than concern for others (Samuel, 1995 and

Freysinger and Flannery, 1992). This kind of sports involvement might contribute to women's self-expression, self-sufficiency, self-esteem and individual empowerment (Henderson et al, 1996). In contrast, women's sports activities when associated with their families reinforce their role as mothers and wives, and strengthen their domestic responsibilities. Chinese working-class women's affiliation to family sport mirrors the Chinese social value system that still regards women's domestic performance as the central of their lives. This patriarchal power constrains working-class women from achieving satisfaction in sport.

7.3.4 Cultural Conflicts and Fitness Exercise

The changing concept of femininity in cities has complex influences on Chinese working-class women. As discussed earlier, the subverted masculinity of Communism, the body image of Western women and the Chinese traditional concept of beauty are mixed. They are embedded into some aspects of Chinese women's life and shape their perception of how fitness exercises can amend their physical appearance. Based on the interviews, most working-class women express their changing point of view on femininity in this way:

I used to consider that as a revolutionary woman of the People's Republic of China, especially a working-class woman, I was truly able to work independently and have completely equal status with men. I did not need to use my dress and makeup to try to please my husband. However, during the reform era, I changed my mind. I realised that dressing-up and making up do not just please men but myself. Having a healthy body and being beautiful looking makes me feel confident, more independent and happier.

(Interviewee No. 22, 2003)

Although they have accepted femininity and no longer hide their feminine appearance, following the image of Western women, working-class women's attitudes are more conservative than middle-class women. As an interviewee said:

I did not think big breasts and bottoms like Western women are suitable for Chinese women. That image is too erotic and demanding. I believe in the traditional beauty of Chinese women – reserved and introvert.

(Interviewee No. 22, 2003)

Another interviewee expressed the view that although she could accept the sexy image of Western women and the way in which Western women presented themselves in the mass media, she would not copy their image and act in that way in her own life.

She explained:

The sexy image of Western women is acceptable to people, because they were born outside Chinese culture. However, if a Chinese woman, except celebrities, had a sexy body and tended to show it publicly, she would be thought of as a disgrace.

(Interviewee No. 20, 2004)

Men's discourse about women's appearance also plays a very important role in women's perception of their own body. An interviewee said:

Chinese men love watching Western women wearing bikinis swimming or playing beach volleyball on TV. However, as for Chinese women, they want them to wear more clothes in public to cover their body. My husband said the sexy image of Western women was just for entertainment; in his real life, he preferred the traditional image of Chinese women: thin, small and gentle.

(Interviewee No. 20, 2004)

Based on the interviews, most Chinese working-class women have internalised the Confucian standard of the women's image. This perspective deeply influences their sports participation. From the study, it can be found that some working-class women worry that participating in fitness exercises can make them unfeminine by increasing ugly muscle. As an interviewee said:

Western women in my view are strong, muscular and powerful. They like to take part in some intensive fitness exercise to increase their muscles. Actually I do not think women with muscles are beautiful. It will reduce women's natural beauty. Women should choose some gentle and graceful physical exercise.

(Interviewee No. 28, 2004)

Another interviewee stated:

Western fitness exercises such as aerobics will produce muscles. I notice those women who exercise aerobics. Their legs are thicker and firmer than normal Chinese women. And also look at the professional sportswomen, some of them just look like men because of too much sports training. Therefore I believe sports activities are good for women's health; excessive

sports activities will harm women's natural looks.

(Interviewee No. 22, 2003)

From the interviews, it can be seen that the masculine perception of women underpins and shapes Chinese working-class women's sports concepts and influences their level of participation. For example, because of men's predisposition towards women's fair skin, some women are reluctant to participate in outdoor sports activities, which they think might darken their skin tone; due to the patriarchal praise of women's thinness and softness, some women refuse to take part in vigorous sports activities that might result in the development of muscles; as the result of masculine preference for women's reserved behaviour, some women choose not to participate in contact sports activities, which might make them aggressive. Middle-class women and working-class women are similar in their acceptance of masculine attitudes. However, middle-class women are more concerned about individual satisfaction, whilst working-class women are more concerned about social acceptance. Therefore, middle-class women tend to find sport to satisfy their individual needs; whilst working-class women tended to participate in socially-approved, non-aggressive and traditional exercises such as exercising *Taiji* or dancing *Yangge*. An interviewee said:

I prefer to take part in some Chinese traditional exercises such as *Taiji*. It has been practised in China for thousands of years. The long history provides that *Taiji* can not only bring health, happiness and peace of mind to us, but can also strengthen the reserved qualities of women. In my experience, daily gentle practice will encourage my body to release tension.

(Interviewee No. 21, 2003)

A *Yangge* dancer stated:

My husband supports me taking part in *Yangge* dance. He says compared to other sports activities, *Yangge* is a traditional dance which embodies the Chinese essence of beauty. He is pleased that I am very beautiful when I dress in gauze costumes, waving the colourful scarves and fans and stepping regularly along with the drumbeats.

(Interviewee No. 11, 2003)

In general, this study appears to show that a large number of Chinese working-class women are conscious of and behave according to the Chinese traditional ideology

concerning women's bodily movement. This mirrors the attitudes shown in both feudal and Maoist society, where they has always been a willingness to achieve male-defined standards of beauty and to win the love and admiration of the male (Hong, 1997). In the reform era, this is reflected in the return to femininity and masculine bias during women's participation in sports activities.

In conclusion, in the process of urbanisation, Chinese working-class women have suffered a lack of control over their lives and this lack of control has been reflected in their inability to manage their own sports activities. Like middle-class women, they demand to be involved in sport but unlike the middle-class they participate in sport informally and causally, and their participation is constrained by social attitudes. The evidence of this study suggests that there are four main categories of constraints which serve to limit working-class women's involvement in sport. They are economic, educational, domestic and cultural constraints. The low income, the lack of economic independence and the concept of frugality restrict their sports consumption. Therefore, working-class women can only participate in simple physical exercises in parks and neighbourhoods. Inadequate physical education and an educational bias against physical development for daughters have influenced working-class girls' sports attitudes and interests in sport. The domestic factors which limit Chinese working-class women's sport are related to their double roles as workers and wives. Lack of leisure time is the major obstacle; the Confucian values that expect women to exhibit obedience, diligence and tolerance, have held working-class women back from pursuing their own needs for sport. The traditional cultural notions of gender-appropriate behaviour act to constrain working-class women from being fully involved in sport. Their physical exercises seem to conform to men's views of female beauty and the beauty of women's bodily movement. The constraints of working-class women's sports participation to certain extent reflect the fact that most Chinese working-class women in the urban transformation declined into economic disadvantage and still live under patriarchal power.

7.4 Unemployed Women and Their Participation in Sport

At the beginning of the reforms, the Chinese market economy was launched and it was declared that efficiency should come first and equality second (Tang and Parish, 2000). The reformists applied the theory of the Western economist Arthur Okun (1975), who stated that the conflict between equality and efficiency was the biggest socio-economic trade-off. The reformists recognised that ‘the Chinese people cannot have the cake of market efficiency and share it equally’. In September 1986, Deng Xiaoping, the principal planner of China’s reform declared that it was necessary ‘to let a minority of people get rich first; then to achieve a common wealth of the whole country’ (Deng, 1994). This economic strategy implied that the transition from a centralised, bureaucratic allocation system to a market-oriented economy would not be painless.

In practice, the economic transition has caused rising unemployment figures. Women were the first victims (Rai, 1992; Li, 1994). With the logic of productivity and profit guiding the workplace, female workers were often the first ones to bear the risk of being made redundant (Liu, 2001b). The rate of Chinese women’s employment decreased dramatically during the 1990s. According to the statistics, the rate of women’s employment was 88.2% in 1990. In 2000, it was reduced to 72% (ACWF and NSB, 2001). Among laid-off female workers, 49.7% acknowledged that they had experienced age and sex discrimination in being made redundant and were seeking re-employment. This figure was 18.9% higher than for male laid-off workers (ACWF & NSB, 2001). Table 7.1 shows the high rate of female unemployment in 1999.

Table 7.1 Female Employees as Percentage of Total Employees in Different Workforce Categories in 1999

(%)

Region	Employed	Registered Unemployed	Unemployed at Year-End	Laid Off
Eastern	30.8	48.1	51.5	47.8
Central	28.1	49.8	50.3	46.6
Southwest	29.2	48.1	49.3	47.4
Northwest	29.2	46.1	48.1	44.9
PRC	29.6	48.5	50.4	46.9

Source: China Labour Statistical Yearbook 2000.

*employed excluded from laid-off labour

What needs to be pointed out is that in the process of economic transformation, female redundancy policy was compounded with female retirement policy.⁸ According to Chinese labour policy, female workers would retire at the age of 50 and female cadres would retire at the age of 55. In the 1990s, some enterprises started to force their female workers to retire when they were 45 years old. When women retired in their middle age, they received very little pension from their employers. Officially, they were called retired; essentially, they were deprived of the chance to work. There was also large number of female workers laid off as the direct result of the closing down and reconstruction of their workplace. Chinese women aged from 40 to 45 bore the most risk of being made redundant. Many employers argued that those women were an economic liability, for they lacked education, had poor skills, did not easily learn new technologies and required more leave-time for domestic and health reasons. It was perceived as an effective way to put into practice the idea that removing women from the work force would effectively solve labour problems (Li, 2003: 225–247).

Since a large number of Chinese women were laid off or retired in their middle 40s, a new phenomenon emerged: an increasing number of unemployed women participated in sport and physical exercise. They took part in physical exercises regularly in parks and playgrounds in neighbourhoods; they looked at sports participation more as a way of improving their social lives rather than for physical exercise itself; they started to become aware of seeking self-expression through their body movement; and so began a new direction of Chinese women's sport at the grassroots. Due to their economic and social status, their sport had different characteristics from middle-class and working-class women.

7.4.1 Unemployment Situations and Sports Participation

Glyptis (1989) argues that unemployment has both positive and negative impacts on people's sports activities. On the one hand, unemployment leaves people with more leisure time; on the other hand the financial loss restricts their sports activities. This

⁸ There are differences between retired women and laid-off women. A woman who retired when she reached retirement age would have a pension from the workplace. The pension depend on her ranking and working years. It also depends on the economic conditions of her employer. A laid-off woman is forced to leave the workplace. Most of them has no pension from their employers. The social relief fund is their sole income.

study has found three kinds of impacts as the result of unemployment on Chinese women's sport. First, unemployment has made available time previously spent on work and reduced the extent of obligatory activity that restricts women's sports participation. Second, unemployment has resulted in the loss of social contacts, self-esteem and self-identity, which have become the motivation for unemployed women to take part in sports activities. Third, unemployment has imposed financial limitations on the choice of sport available to women.

Unemployed women have enough time to spend on sports activities as they withdraw from the labour market. According to an investigation on the allocation of women's time in Tianjing in 1998, unemployed women had 369 minutes leisure time each day on average compared to female workers, who only had 293 minutes leisure time each day on average (See Table 7.3, Wang, 2003: 281). Obtaining enough leisure time was a prerequisite for women to become involved in sports activities. As an interviewee said:

Last year when I was laid off, suddenly I felt I had much more surplus time than before. At first, I did not know how to arrange this time because I was used to the busy working routine – going to work in the early morning and coming back in late evening. I had no time to do the things I was interested in, including sport. Now I decided to use this time on exercising my body. In the morning, when my husband goes to work, I start to do some housework. Then I come to the park near my home. I find that the time goes very quickly when doing exercises and I do not feel alone.

(Interviewee No. 28, 2004)

Free time is a gain for those women who are able to use it in ways that are personal satisfying. One interviewee was very positive towards her earlier retirement:

I felt completely free when I left my workplace. The wages in my factory were very low. But the job was stressful and insecure. It was better to retire early rather than working hard for pitiful wages. I tried to be re-employed. But it is very difficult for middle-aged women to find a well-paid job. Fortunately, my husband had a little business and my son left college to help him. My responsibility now is concentrated on taking care of their lives. Besides this, I am just thinking of how to enjoy the rest of my life and make myself healthy and happy. I like dancing. Now I have time to accomplish this hobby. I come to the park to dance with others at least three times a week.

(Interviewee No. 24, 2003)

The statement implies that increasing freedom from paid work provides women with opportunities to become involved in sport. In this study, it was found that some women who had been laid off felt their previous work was boring, frustrating and generally unsatisfying. For women in these circumstances, unemployment might be preferable to work. However, the prerequisite was that they had enough money to live on.

Apart from gaining more leisure time, unemployed women's need to develop social contacts and rebuild self-identity is the driving force for the increase in sports activities. As Glyptis (1989) suggests, most people are accustomed to organising their daily routines around externally imposed time commitments. While some people might welcome the extra time, others might find it boring and burdensome. The Marienthal study (Jahoda et al., 1972) found that people's inability to fill time meaningfully led to apathy and depression. An interviewee described her feelings about unemployment:

When I was laid off, I felt totally lost. I did not know how to spend the extra time. My husband was busy in his work; my daughter was busy in her study. In the daytime, they both went out and left me alone at home. I was depressed and felt I was useless in the world.

(Interviewee No. 29, 2004)

Before the economic reform, the work unit used to be the only social life experienced by Chinese women – including sports participation. Without a work unit, this meant being excluded from the mainstream of society. As Kelvin (1981) explained, any given environment has a structure, in the sense that we know what to expect of it. That set of expectations gives us a sense of security and certainty in our thoughts, feelings and actions. Employment is important both for the social setting and for the identity it gives people in broader social relationships. No longer sure of their place in society, unemployed people tend to withdraw from social activities, not just because financial strictures force them to do so, but because of 'a subjective sense of inadequacy, a feeling that one was not quite a full member of the society in which social life took place' (Kelvin, 1981: 14). In order to keep in touch with the society, Chinese unemployed women try to reconstruct a new space, to become re-involved in the public sphere. Participation in sport activities provides them with a good chance of

achieving this goal. An interviewee who was 46 years old said:

I was an administrative secretary. When my workplace informed me that I had to retire early, I was shocked and felt very depressed. I had worked there for 25 years. I worked very hard and had strong affection for my job. Suddenly I had to leave it. I was accustomed to going to work every day; then one day I was told that I did not need to get up early to rush to my office. There were no amount of documents waiting for me and no post for me to deal with. I felt totally lost. During that period, I suffered from insomnia and migraine. My friends suggested I should exercise *Taiji*. I accepted and began to learn *Taiji* casually in parks. The *Taiji* coach was very patient. She was a volunteer teaching people *Taiji* and the course was free. Since I started to learn *Taiji*, I have become much more energetic. And moreover, I've got spiritual sustenance. I have made friends with other laid-off women. We not only exchange views of *Taiji*, but also exchange personal feelings in terms of work, family and children. Sometimes we organise some activities like *Taiji* performances in neighbourhoods or help train elder people to exercise *Taiji*. All of these activities make me feel I am back in society.

(Interviewee No. 25, 2003)

As Glyptis (1989) suggests, if there is no work to do, then people must find identity and purpose in a work substitute. Sport has become an answer. Based on the research, most unemployed women participate in sport regularly because they have opportunities to meet other people and communicate with them. It seems that they desire to seek a platform for sociability. Under these circumstances, joining in different sports organisations, clubs, leisure centres and recreation venues has become a new way for unemployed women to be re-involved in a wider public space. As an interviewee stated:

In our *Yangge* Dance organisation, we had many activities and performances in public. For example, *Yangge* dance competitions among different districts; performing in important celebrations such as Spring Festival Gatherings and Labour Holiday Marches. We are very busy in special seasons. I feel very happy that I could do something valuable when I was laid off.

(Interviewee No. 26, 2003)

Another interviewee commented:

The atmosphere of sport was very pleasant and it was very easy to make friends. In my opinion, sports activity was not only an approach to keep health but also a stage to display your beauty, express your emotions and

keep in touch with society. Since I joined the dance association, my life has been enriched and I have known many people from different occupations. By communicating with them, I have learnt a lot which I had never heard before.

(Interviewee No. 24, 2003)

The interviews demonstrated that the unemployed women had achieved self-confidence and self-identity and social contact from involving themselves in sport. Because of unemployed women's strong demand for engaging in the public sphere through sports participation, Chinese governments have paid special attention to providing sport for laid-off women. A report by the Urban Sports Work Conference (USWC) in July 2004 indicated that:

To enable unemployed women to make meaningful use of time, sport plays an important role in providing sociable and socialising activity, adding an important dimension to an integrated community life.

It reported that since more and more women had joined in sports activities, there had been fewer trivial disputes or conflicts in local communities. The relationships of neighbours had become more harmonious and friendly (USWC, 2004).

In addition to social needs, sports activities also fulfil the cultural lives of unemployed women. Most middle-aged unemployed women grew up accepting Communist education and some of them are still deeply influenced by Confucian thoughts. As discussed in Chapter Five, Communist culture tended to erase women's feminine characters and any feminine gestures and performance were criticised as kinds of petty bourgeois sentiments. Chinese traditional culture, meanwhile, could not bear to see the woman's body being exposed and movement expressed actively such as jumping and hopping. It was regarded as obscene and indecent for women. After many years of suppression by restrictive body culture, since the 1980s new forms of sports activity such as Disco dance⁹ and *Yangge* dance¹⁰ have allowed Chinese

⁹ Disco dance was a fitness activity that emerged around 1985. The types of body movement characteristic of Disco were Western-inspired. Hip-swivelling and shoulder-rolling were key defining elements, but they appeared to lack explicit sexual connotation. It was performed to Western pop music.

¹⁰ *Yangge* dance from rural northern China was distinguished by its folk origins from Western Disco. In the old days, people danced *yangge*, sometimes with folk music, when celebrating festivals, triumphs, or at weddings. Since the 1980s, it has been more a physical exercise than an art performance in Chinese cities. It prevails among women at the grassroots. *Yangge* involves slow dancing in a circle to the accompaniment of a large drum and cymbals. The women dance in pastel-coloured gauze dresses and wave matching silk scarves. It helps them to exercise their arms, legs and waists.

women suddenly to feel the beauty and emancipation of physical expression. Through the dances, unemployed women have learnt how to release cultural tensions in relation to their bodies. As a participant stated:

When I first saw those women dancing Disco, I felt it was 'ugly'. All the women were sixty to seventy years old, with grey hair and some with extra weight. Their bodies weren't that beautiful. But they put on brightly coloured clothes and got up to there and danced, swivelling their rears. However, I, by chance, got involved in this Disco dance. I danced once, and then never wanted to give it up. The longer you dance, the more beautiful it became. It helped me get rid of the depression of unemployment and rebuilt my self-confidence.

(Interviewee No. 29, 2004)

This fad of Disco and *Yangge* illustrates the rapid changes in Chinese body culture initiated by the growth of consumerism and exposure to international culture. Although Disco and *Yangge* originate from different body cultures and demonstrate different tastes with regard to beauty, they both exhibit the same tendency of Chinese women, to be aware of and desire to use their bodies to express vivid lives.

Although unemployed women have a strong need to participate in sport, their financial inability limits the places and types of participation they can experience. The study found that most unemployed women cannot afford expensive sports goods. They normally participate in physical exercises where there is free sports access. The most popular physical activities among unemployed women are Disco dance and *Yangge* dance. Disco dance and *Yangge* dance normally take place in parks, squares or open areas in neighbourhoods with little entrance fee. In almost every park in Beijing in the early morning hours, handfuls of female Disco dancers can be found clustered around a large cassette player (*People's Daily*, June the 5th, 1988). The *Yangge* dancers have taken over the parks and even sidewalks and streets to dance. Almost anywhere in the city in fair weather, drums can be heard starting up as dusk begins to fall and the exercisers continue well into the night.¹¹ Many unemployed women pointed out that they chose parks and playgrounds in neighbourhoods as their sports preference, not because they were environmentally friendly or well managed, but because they were free. The sports centre or fitness gyms were too expensive for them.

¹¹ In March 1997, the Beijing Government banned most outdoor performances under anti-noise pollution regulations. *Yangge* groups, however, were vocal in their opposition to the ban and their right to spaces for exercise. After negotiation, *Yangge* dancers were allowed to dance in parks but not in streets.

In addition, the unemployed women tend to choose simple activities. For example, an interviewee explained why she danced Disco as a way of exercise:

Disco dancing is suitable for us middle-aged women. Unlike aerobics, which is suited for young people, it does not need energy and skill. Just swivel your waists and hips to the music.

(Interviewee No. 23, 2003)

As with Disco, *Yangge* is perceived to be a simple exercise for health and entertainment among unemployed women. A participant explained why she danced *Yangge* every day:

Yangge doesn't require expensive instruments or a formal stage. A passer-by might just join the group and bring her stuff. You could dance for five minutes or five hours. In a *Yangge* dance, you just stretch out your limbs and forget about your frustrations by moving to the rhythm of the drumbeats. It is easy to exercise.

(Interviewee No. 26, 2004)

Disco dance and *Yangge* dance are perceived to be vigorous and exiting activities without requiring special skills or expensive resources. They are free and suitable for unemployed women. However, far from taking on new and more varied sports activities, these simple sports activities are not fully satisfying socially and culturally (COC, 2005). Since the market economy has flooded the cities with an increasing number of new sports activities, unemployed women can feel alienated from the mainstream of Chinese sport.

7.4.2 Domestic Restriction and Sports Activities

The factors that affect unemployed women's sports participation are not only their financial constraints, but also their domestic situation, which is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture and patriarchal ideology. As discussed previously, in the 1990s, to solve the problem of surplus labour forces in cities, some Chinese governors advocated turning women into full-time homemakers. They asserted that the dual burden of career and domestic work was detrimental to women's health, and it would also affect family life and raising children (Li, 1990 and All-China Federation of

Labour Unions, 1988). Thus, the women’s crisis in losing jobs was rationalised as a means of returning to the traditional ‘household responsible’ system, which idealised women’s roles at home. Clearly, the domestic roles of women fundamentally affect their sports activities (Stockdale, 1985).

Firstly, women have to spend more time in domestic chores and routines since being laid off and staying at home. In the research, many unemployed women stated that as their paid working hours decreased, their unpaid work at home increased. This was the timetable of a housewife’s daily routine.

Table 7.2 Timetable of an Interviewee

6:30	Get up
6:30-8:00	Prepare breakfast
8:00-8:30	Have breakfast
8:30-9:30	Clean house
9:30-10:00	Take part in exercises in neighbourhood playground
10:00-11:00	Shopping for fresh food
11:00-12:00	Cook lunch
12:00-1:30	Serve husband lunch and wash dishes
13:30-14:30	Noon nap
14:30-16:30	Wash and iron clothes
16:30-17:00	Go out to pick up daughter from school
17:00-18:30	Cook dinner
18:30-20:00	Have dinner, wash dishes and clean house
20:00-21:00	Help daughter with her homework
21:00-22:00	Watch TV
22:30	Go to sleep

Source: Interviewee No. 14, 2003.

This timetable implies that household obligations dominate her life. From the interviews, many unemployed women had felt that they thought they would have lived more freely if they no longer went to work; the fact was they did not have much personal time to pursue their own lives. While they were freed from work

commitments, family commitments occupied most of their time. Table 7.3 compares the time allocation of employed women and unemployed women. It demonstrates that unemployed women spend more than 6 hours on housework.

Table 7.3 Time Allocation of Employed Women and Unemployed Women

Time allocation (minutes)	Employed women	Unemployed women
Work	264	78
Housework	238	315
Leisure	293	369

Source: Wang Yalin (ed.), 2003.

The evidence shows that after women withdraw from the workplace, some feel a sense of release from the obligations of work, whilst others freed from paid work meet other commitments, especially family obligations, in large measure instead. In such cases their perceived freedom might be no greater than when they were at work. As an interviewee said:

When I had a job, sometimes I could go out with my colleagues to play table tennis during the break time. However, when I lost the job and stayed at home, I rarely had opportunities to go out with my previous colleagues and my whole life was surrounded by family affairs. I could only find a short time to exercise with my neighbours.

(Interviewee No. 14, 2003)

Secondly, when a woman is laid off and becomes a housewife, people take it for granted that she has to sacrifice all her life to the family. This situation deprives women of their right to enjoy their sports activities. As an interviewee described her experiences of unemployment:

When my husband heard that I had been laid off, he actually rejoiced at my misfortunes. He said the job took lots of my energy away from the family. He said if I did not go to work everyday, I could pay more attention to my daughter and him. We could avoid the continuous arguing over whose responsibility was the cooking, cleaning and helping our child's studies. Obviously, I should undertake all of housework and support him as he

pursued his career. He was quite happy with the division; I felt disappointed. But I had no choice because now it was he who earned money for our family; thus, I had to play a good role in family. Some people think if women have no job, they do not have the right to take part in leisure activities.

(Interviewee No. 14, 2003)

Many Chinese unemployed women have internalised this principle and consider that they should sacrifice their sports lives to family duties since they do not go to work. The first reason is that, since women do not work, they have to depend on their husbands financially. The second reason is that when women are unemployed, they tend to turn to the family to seek security and psychological certainty.¹² The third reason is embedded in traditional Chinese culture, where women should not put themselves or their needs ahead of the needs of their families, husbands and children. Their sports activities obviously should be subordinated to this moral system (Wang, 2003: 293). As an interviewee stated:

Family life is very important to me. If I were single, I might have more opportunities to participate in sports activities. As a wife and a mother, I never have this kind of privilege. I could not leave housework unfinished and play (take part in physical exercise) outside with the neighbours. Otherwise I would be blamed by my husband when he came back without food on the table. Of course, I could not forgive myself if I did not complete my domestic duty but played outside.

(Interviewee No. 14, 2003)

Another interviewee said:

The Central Park was just on my way to the open market. Every morning before I went shopping for food, I would come to the park first. Apart from this period, I did not have a fixed time to take exercise.

(Interviewee No. 28, 2004)

Another interviewee stated:

I prefer to come out and take part in exercises in the evening. When my husband has settled down in front of the TV and my son started to do his homework, I can totally relax and enjoy my leisure times. However, because

¹² As Brown (1978) suggests that work is a source of personal and social identity; loss of work means a crisis of identity. When women lose their jobs, family and housework might be a device to make them feel self-conscious to certain extent. Thus, these women have a strong feeling of working for the family.

of the night, it was not safe to go too far; I normally walk around my neighbourhood; sometimes I joined the Disco dance group in the playground.

(Interviewee No. 30, 2004)

The evidence shows that unemployed women choose parks and neighbourhoods as their sports settings not only because of financial limitations, but also because of their domestic responsibilities. When they decide to take part in sport, the precondition is that it will not affect their domestic obligations.

In summary, the emergence of a large number of unemployed women in cities has been the consequence of Chinese economic reform and unfair economic labour policy during urbanisation. Unemployed women are normally middle-aged with low education and fewer social resources. When they are laid off, they have few opportunities to be re-employed. They are encouraged to go home and become full-time housewives, being marginalised in society. Under these circumstances, participation in sport activities provides them with a free venue to rebuild social contacts and self-identity. Getting more free time after unemployment was a precondition for them to become involved in sport. However, it does not mean that these women can freely participate in sport. Firstly their financial incapacity restricts their choices of sport; secondly, increasing housework and domestic commitments dominate their lives so that the time, places and type of sports activities are limited.

From the analyses of the interrelationship between unemployment and the sports participation of women, it can be seen that a large number of unemployed women have turned to sport to use their surplus time and energy. As we have seen, sports activities do modify their lives and help create an alternative lifestyle; however, since they are marginalised from the mainstream of society, they have lost much to gain this freedom. Sport provides them with opportunities for emancipation and has become an effective means for developing their social skills and self-expression. However, sport cannot replace the self-satisfaction and identity given by their work. Sports activity was fine in itself as a complement to employment, but it was not a functional alternative to work. Only when women have the opportunity to work and gain financial independence can they participate in sport fully.

7.5 Conclusion

According to the sports feminist approach, women's sport operates within a framework of the structural, ideological and hegemonic constraints of patriarchy (Wimbush and Talbot, 1988). As for Chinese women's sport, it is also historically framed by patriarchal perceptions. Nevertheless, during the process of urbanisation, Chinese women's sport had gathered new characteristics. It is extensively and intensively embedded in the social stratification. This study discovered that within different classes, economic, educational, domestic and cultural factors, many different opportunities and limitations for women to participate in sport are produced.

First of all, since the Chinese urban reforms, economic factors are the key to developments in both the country and individuals. It is also a crucial factor in drawing a boundary for different developments in women's sports participation. As the result of inequalities related to earnings, position and social resources which have arisen in contemporary China since the 1980s, Chinese women's sports participation has developed different dimensions. Middle-class women, earning high incomes and with financial autonomy, participate in sports activities of their choices. They display strong enthusiasm and potential to spend money in order to enjoy high standards of sports facilities and services. Working-class women also desire to take part in sport to increase their quality of life, but their financial limitations restricted their choices so that they can only select cheap ways of being engaged in sport. As for unemployed women, lacking economic capability, they tend to take part in sports activities which are free at the point of delivery. The flourishing parks and community sports activities and voluntary sports organisations meet their requirements. Economic factors have drawn a boundary around the different ways that women's sports participation and personal concepts of exercise have developed.

Secondly, during urbanisation, the emphasis on the importance of education for girls and women's self-improvement has provided women with access to the process of sports socialisation. However, women's different educational backgrounds decide their sports attitudes and concepts. Middle-class women with high education have been imbued with good attitudes, skills and interests in sports participation. They are aware that physical exercise is a tool with which to achieve freedom, independence

and enjoyment of life. For working-class and unemployed women, a low level of education restricts their social access to sports socialisation. Influenced by traditional concepts, their potential and interests in sport are limited.

Thirdly, women's domestic situation is a crucial element influencing women's participation in sport. Strict and complex family relationships, household chores and traditional concepts of women's 'virtues' constitute the institutional and ideological constraints against women's participation in sport. Middle-class women, although they still need to accept domestic responsibilities and live within traditional moral culture, have financial opportunities and personal capabilities that enable them to demand that housework is shared. They demand to be allowed to pursue individual interests and to seek personal fulfilment rather than remain in utilitarian submission for the benefit of the family. This provides them with more individual time and freedom to take part in sport. Working-class women have to play a double role as worker and housekeeper. Lacking economic opportunity or self-awareness, they tend to conform to the patriarchal arrangements. This is a major factor which deprives working-class women of leisure time to take part in sport. In addition, being a good wife and loving mother still dominates working-class concepts of what women should be. This traditional ideology limits working-class women's individual pursuits of sports. For unemployed women, although they have more leisure time than working-class women, they still cannot free themselves from the drudgery of domestic chores. Because of their unemployment, they are more dependent on husbands and their families and have to accept the traditional roles of wife and mother. This limits their opportunities to participate in sports activities.

Fourthly, Chinese women's sport is intimately connected with women's body culture in transitional Chinese society. Influenced by Western culture, middle-class women exhibit a strong desire to change their body image into fit, thin and sexy. It has caused the boom in fitness exercises among Chinese middle-class women. Working-class women are more conservative in relation to Western culture. They tend to participate in socially-approved, non-aggressive and feminine exercises to conform to the Chinese traditional ideology of women's bodies. As for unemployed women, they focus on body expression and enjoyment to rebuild their self-identity.

Table 7.4 Comparison of Women's Participation in Sport from Different Classes

Social Factors	Middle-class	Working-class	Unemployed
Economic Status	High income and financial independency ↓ <i>Participate in sport by using high standard of sports facilities and services (fitness clubs)</i>	Low income and lack of financial autonomy ↓ <i>Participate in sports activities in cheaper ways (cheap fitness gyms and exercise in neighbourhoods)</i>	No income and lack of financial autonomy ↓ <i>Participate in sports activities with free access (parks and communities)</i>
Educational Background	Universities and parental support ↓ <i>Good sports habits and positive sports attitudes</i>	Middle schools and parental bias towards girls' sport ↓ <i>Lack of knowledge, skills and interests in sport</i>	Middle schools ↓ <i>Lack of knowledge, skills in sport</i>
Domestic Roles	Changes of domestic status (partially released from domestic burden) ↓ <i>Possibilities for increasing leisure time and freedom to participate in sport</i>	Retained double roles (mother and worker) ↓ <i>Lack of leisure time and domestic constraints in sport</i>	Strengthened domestic role (housewife) ↓ <i>Increasing leisure time and limited ways to participate</i>
Cultural Oreintation	Influenced by the Western culture ↓ <i>Fitness exercise (Western style)</i>	Influenced by traditional culture ↓ <i>Social-approved exercise (traditional style)</i>	<i>Exercise for body expression and enjoyment</i>

According to socialist feminism, economic class inequalities must be abolished if all women, not just the more advantaged, are to gain any enhancement of their rights. Because most Chinese working-class and unemployed women are economically disadvantaged, the commercialisation of sport is closely connected with the continuing exclusion of women from sport (Theberge, 1984; Beamish, 1984). To

narrow the consumer gap and have more women benefiting from modern sports activities, women's economic capacity and independence as a whole needs to be enhanced. This requires fair and equal economic arrangements for all Chinese women.

In addition, according to socialist feminism, the power of patriarchy constructs women's sport. To achieve gender equality in sport, patriarchal forms of social life such as polarised sex-roles and other forces that maintain male privilege should be abolished. Because of the continuity of patriarchal power in domestic, educational and cultural matters, Chinese women cannot achieve equal opportunities and freedom in sport. This results in the situation where Chinese women's needs and interests do not dictate the structure and function of their sports experience. To achieve a real equity in sport, Chinese women's own consciousness and efforts to be engaged in the struggle against the existing patriarchal order need to be cultivated. This requires a more democratic climate and a large-scale feminist movement in Chinese society.

Furthermore, according to the body theory of sports feminists, cultural factors construct and constrain the female sporting body (Hong, 1997). Because of the changing urban culture in China since the 1980s, Chinese women have a relatively free climate to pursue their bodily expression and physical emancipation. Compared to the Maoist era, women's participation in sport comes from their own desires rather than state ideology, and this is unprecedented progress. However, Chinese women taking physical exercise create meanings for themselves, but these meanings continued to be framed and constructed by the 'feminisation of sport' (Hall, 1996). Women seek their full potential and empowerment in the integration of self in sport, but at the same time desire to conform to the social construction of the ideal of femininity. Therefore, the emancipation of Chinese women's body through sport has not yet finished. To achieve this goal, a long process to subvert patriarchally dominated culture is needed.

In summary, urbanisation has seen tremendous changes in Chinese women's social status and in gender relations in the wider society. Significant change also has occurred in Chinese women's experiences of sport. These changes are intimately and dialectically connected. By examining the status of women's participation in sport, it can be concluded that on the one hand barriers to women's sports participation have weakened and individual freedoms in sport have increased; on the other hand, the

institutional and ideological controls over women's sport still exist. These controls regulate women's participation and limit the meanings and values of sporting experiences. Chinese women have not fully and equally utilised sports opportunities created by urbanisation; most Chinese women still live within patriarchal arrangements. Consequently, they do not completely fulfil their ambitions in life; the emancipating meanings and values of women's sport are limited by social institutions and the patriarchal culture. The Chinese women's emancipation movement still has a long way to go to achieve real gender equality.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Into the 21st Century: Urbanisation and Chinese Women in Sport

During the past ten years, the study of Chinese women's sport has emerged. Some Chinese scholars and Western scholars have demonstrated an increasing interest in the role of sport as a means of maintaining, shaping and transmitting bodily images and moral values of Chinese women. 'The body in sport – and the female body in particular – is a location for debate about the changing nature of ideology, power, social structures and cultural system' (Hong, 2001a: 2). The following three books in the recent past have stimulated strong interest and propelled inquiries into women in sport in China. Fan Hong (1997) and Susan Brownell (1995) have examined the female body and culture in China. Their research on the body in sport in China reveals just how untenable the notion of a 'natural female body' is. Their work demonstrated that the female body is an ideal starting point for any consideration of social and cultural constructions. They have examined the relationship between women's bodies, exercise and emancipation in China and tried to assess the impact of women's sport on the status of women in Chinese society. 'The dramatic and brutal patriarchal traditions of physical repression of the female body in Chinese history make the physical repression of Chinese women an issue of special significance and a valuable case study in the history of the emancipation of the modern female body' (Hong, 2001a: 4). Following Hong and Brownell, Jingxia Dong's work (2003) has celebrated the great success of Chinese elite sportswomen and discussed the social, economic, political and cultural factors that contributed to their success in elite sport. My research focuses on the transformation of women's sport at the grassroots in the post-Mao era. I argue that urbanisation, as a systematic transformation of Chinese society, has made an unprecedented impact on women and their sports participation in China.

In order to understand how urbanisation has influenced women's sport in the post-Mao era, the thesis firstly re-examined the historical background of the interrelationship between urbanisation, women and sport in the Maoist era (1949-1979). In general, there are three periods in this era: the start of urbanisation (1949-1956); the decline of urbanisation (1957-1966); and the anti-urbanisation period (1967-1979). In the first period from 1949 to 1956, socialist industrialisation initiated urbanisation. Chinese women were largely involved in social production. As social production required strong bodies, women were encouraged to exercise their bodies. Work units in urban areas played a major role in organising women's sports participation. During the period from 1957 to 1966, in the process of the Great Leap Forward (GLF), unbalanced development between urban and rural areas caused the disaster of an unprecedented famine in the Chinese history. After the failure of the GLF, urbanisation was suspended and women's mass sport declined. However, the elite women's sport system had been established since the government was keen to use its limited resources to develop elite sport instead of promoting large-scale mass sport to achieve its political goals. The period of 1967-1979 witnessed a disaster for Chinese society – the Cultural Revolution. Urbanisation was criticised as a bourgeois way of life and anti-urbanisation was promoted by the government to reduce the economic gap between urban and rural areas. Urbanites were sent to countryside to be re-educated. However, as a revolutionary symbol, women's strong bodies were encouraged at the grassroots as a way of erasing gender differences and establishing an androgynous social order.

Urbanisation in the Maoist era on the one hand attempted to speed up the urban industrial economy with the financial sacrifice of agriculture; on the other hand, it was obliged to introduce strong measures to restrain the rise of the urban population and urban life. Under these circumstances, national development to a certain extent was accelerated, but individuals lost the freedom to fulfil themselves through choosing their own lifestyle, attitudes and values. As a result, Chinese women's sports participation on the one hand gave its political meanings to the state, bringing the country benefits and glory, and creating a symbolic image of women's emancipation; on the other hand, the government did not provide women with choices in their sports activities to fulfil their own needs, desire and rights as independent individuals. The female sporting body was suppressed by enforcing masculinity and the concept of

gender became an unmarked and neutralised category, its role as a vessel for self-identity was greatly diminished. This situation did not change for woman's sport until the emergence of the new process of urbanisation under the Chinese economic reforms of the 1980s.

Since the 1980s, urbanisation has accelerated greatly in China. It has not only increased the urban population and urban areas, but has also stimulated the rise of urban life in economic, political and cultural aspects. The market reforms have undermined the barriers between urban and rural populations. With the dynamics of social mobility and market orientation, urban people's incomes and consumption levels have risen dramatically. Urbanisation has also rationalised individuals' own interests and created a relatively free climate for Chinese people to control their own lives. In addition, it has accelerated the transformation of China from traditional tenets to modern principles and ideas about life. The most distinctive phenomenon is that the uniform urban culture of the Maoist era has been replaced by a multi-cultural environment in cities. Hence, citizens can choose their own religions and beliefs. For Chinese society, urbanisation is a systematic transformation with a continuous interaction between economic, political and social elements. For individuals, it offers them new lifestyles and values. These social changes caused by urbanisation have led to the transformation of women's sport in the new era.

Since the start of urbanisation in the 1980s, Chinese sport has gradually been released from a strictly political function and tried to produce more economic, social and cultural meanings for individual's urban lives. Accordingly, the sports space, participation models and sports values have changed. Women's mass sport has been transformed and proliferates in cities. The contribution of urbanisation to women's sport is reflected in four dimensions: firstly, sports policy highlights the importance of women's physical activities to their urban life and explicitly formulates approaches to developing women's sport at the grassroots. Secondly, the changing way of urban life has stimulated new demands from Chinese women to be involved in sport at the grassroots. Consciousness of health, fitness, recreation and consumption constitute new concepts in women's sport and encourage women to use sport as a means to enjoy life. Thirdly, the institutional structure of Chinese cities has been transformed from a work-unit system into a community system. This has changed the mode of

women's sport from a work-unit organised form into a self-organised form, with diversified choices as far as their own preferences and interests are concerned. Fourthly, the reconstruction of Chinese urban physical structure during urbanisation has extended the spaces for women to participate in sport, while making up for the deficiency of sports grounds, parks, commercial districts and residential districts in cities has brought convenience to Chinese women's sport.

From the empirical evidence, it can be seen that the main contribution of urbanisation to the participation of Chinese women in sport has extended to political, economic, social and cultural areas. The expanded functions of sport have enriched the meaning of sport to women's lives. The commercialisation tendency of sports activities has created new forms and new concepts in women's sport. The changes of social settings for sports participation has provided more opportunities for women to enter public spaces and to associate with each other. And the increasing concerns about fashion, beauty, health and fitness have created new cultural phenomena in women's sport. Compared to women's sport in the Maoist era, the greatest changes lie in the fact that the government no longer rigidly compels women to take part in sport against their will. The government has taken steps to lead, support and assist women's sports participation. Chinese women themselves have begun to regard sport as a way to make their lives richer and varicoloured. Participating in sport, for them, has become a way of urban life.

The transformation of sport has provided women with opportunities to pursue their own benefits and fulfilment. However, not all of them can equally or fully benefit. The transformation of women's sport has also gone side by side with the stratification of women's status in cities. During urbanisation, Chinese women have been divided into different classes based on occupation, education, income, lifestyle and cultural refinement. Women's economic capacity, educational background, domestic status and cultural values fundamentally affect their sports participation. Sport serves women at different levels according to their class. Chinese women's sport has therefore emerged with diversified forms but with a strongly stratified character as outlined below.

With high income, good education and open minds, middle-class women are willing to spend money on enjoying sport with a high quality of facilities and services. They

look at sport as a mode of self-development and self-expression. Economic independence is the precondition for their consumption of sport. High education is essential for them in shaping their sports attitudes and habits. Their improving status in the domestic sphere has partially released them from patriarchal restrictions. Influences from Western culture have stimulated their enthusiasm for pursuing fitness and sexiness and establishing self-realisation through body movement. Through participation, middle-class women have recognised that sport can be used as an instrument to resist imposed gender-related constraints. They are stylish, ambitious and successful. They have become a new social force leading the country's future.

Like middle-class women, working-class women also demand involvement in sport. But their sports participation is more informal and casual. They do not often go to fitness clubs and do not like to spend money on sports activities. They adopt traditional ways of exercising in neighbourhoods, streets, squares and parks after work and housework. They look at sport as a way of leisure and keeping healthy but do not recognise its functions for self-expression and self-emancipation. There are four main categories of constraints that limit working-class women's sport: 1) low income, financial dependence and the concept of frugality restricts their sports consumption; 2) their low level of education influences working-class women's sports attitudes and interests in sport; 3) their double roles as workers and wives prevents them taking part in sport in their leisure time and Confucian values are major hindrances to their pursuit of their own sporting needs; 4) traditional cultural notions of gender-appropriate behaviour act to constrain the forms of their sports participation. The characteristics of Chinese working-class women's sport in urban transformation are linked closely to their economic disadvantages within continuing patriarchal power.

Besides the middle class and the working class, there has emerged a new group of unemployed women in cities during urbanisation. Since many female workers have been dismissed from their work in their middle 40s, an increasing number of unemployed women are showing an interest in and an enthusiasm for participating in sport and physical exercises. It is the unexpected situation of unemployed women being marginalised from the mainstream of society that has caused their movement to rediscover the sporting arena as a site for sociability and self-expression. They perceive sports participation more as a way of socialisation, at the same time seeking

self-expression through body movement. However, for most unemployed women, their sports participation is curtailed by their financial constraints and increasing housework and domestic commitments. Unlike middle-class women, their sports participation does not bring them improved social status or offer them fulfilment in contemporary society.

Exploration of the three classes of women reflects that women's different economic, social, domestic and cultural status has framed different contents, forms and meanings of their sports participation. Generally speaking, on the one hand, barriers to women's sports participation have weakened, and individual freedom in sport has increased; on the other hand, the institutional and ideological controls over women's sport still exist and challenge Chinese women in their sports lives. These controls regulate their participation and limit the meanings and values of sporting experience. Under these controls, Chinese women cannot equally utilise sports opportunities created by urbanisation; some of them still live within patriarchal arrangements and do not completely succeed in pursuing a good quality of life.

As demonstrated in Chapter Three, the emancipation of women's bodies through sport is crucial to rebuilding women's status and liberating them from the existing patriarchal order. For Chinese women, sports participation is always a part of the history of women's struggle to control their bodies and minds – to achieve their freedom (Hong, 1997: 279). In Chinese history, the woman's body was an object of power, which was produced in order to be controlled, identified and reproduced by different patriarchal cultures, either Confucianism or Communism. Since urbanisation, Chinese women have recognised the subjectivity of their bodies. They constantly express their own expectations and desires for bodily emancipation. However, under the influence of traditional Chinese culture and Western fashion trends, women are not free from the discourse of stereotypical femininity. As a result, confusion, conflicts and contradiction emerge when they participate in sport.

According to the research, it is obvious that individual women in sport actively create meanings of their own through sports activities, but these meanings continue to be framed and constructed by dominant forces in the society. On the one hand Chinese women intend to seek a full potential and empowerment in sport; on the other hand they desire to conform to the societal construction of the feminine ideal. The bodies of

women have been freed from the political discourse of the state, but are bound again by the cultural norms of urban society. As Huang Shuqin, a Chinese cultural feminist argued:

Both the Cultural Revolution and commercialised society today are based on male power. In this respect, they are the same. The difference is that during the Cultural Revolution, men wanted women to become masculinised. In today's society, however, men want women to become feminised. In both periods men are telling women what to do, so in terms of male power, they are basically equivalent.

- cited from Yang, 1999, p. 35

For these reasons, the emancipation of female bodies is not yet complete in China.

In conclusion, to meet the aims proposed in the introduction, the thesis has explored Chinese women's sport in the post-Mao era from three aspects. Firstly, it has explored how urbanisation has transformed Chinese women's sport with newly emerged functions, values, forms and spaces. Secondly, it has discussed the change of women's status during urbanization and its impact on the stratification of women's sports participation. Thirdly, it has argued that influenced both by the Western culture and Chinese traditional culture, the development of Chinese women's sport in the post-Mao era is riddled with complexities and contradictions. Nevertheless, women's struggle for increased opportunities in the process of urbanisation has resulted in dramatic changes: Chinese women have gained opportunities to participate in a vast range of sport; sport has become a means to make women positive, pleasure-loving and empowered; Chinese women's consciousness of emancipating their own bodies has been creative and they are active agents in this process.

Urbanisation will continue to drive Chinese sport forward into the 21st century. Women's sport as an institutional and cultural phenomenon will be further moulded by the interplay of the elements that comprise the process of urbanisation. Nevertheless, the future development of women's sport will not be automatic; it needs institutional support to change the power relations of gender in society widely and sport in particular (Hargreaves, 1996).

Firstly, since women's sport will be confronted with the crisis of being displaced to the margins of the market-oriented sports system, the Chinese government should

have considerable involvement in women's sport in a variety of ways. With regard to sports policy, a combination of strategies clearly needs, for example, to channel resources to fund women's sport; to establish women's sports organisations within central and local authorities; and more importantly, to promote women's leadership in sport at different levels. Also the official women's organisation, the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) while carrying out its mission to improve women's social status, should also pay particular attention to women's sport and exercise including the dissemination of women's rights in sport and supporting their sports participation.

Secondly, since the development of women's sports participation depends on continual changes in how sports are organised, promoted, played and portrayed, Chinese sports reform needs to take the characteristics of women's sport into account. New forms of sport for women at the grassroots therefore need to be created; and women's team sports also need to be encouraged, for example, using multiple ways of promoting women's sport, providing programmes that bring women and men together to share sports experiences and creating new orientations based on the pleasure, competition, participation approach and performance.

Thirdly, the commercialisation of sport will dominate Chinese sport in the 21st century. For women, as discussed earlier, it has positive and negative influences. On the one hand, the commercialisation of sport will continue to present strong messages that appeal to women's enthusiasm for sport for reasons of both fitness and recreation. It will also produce more opportunities for women to gain access to modern sports activities. On the other hand, the commercialisation of sport will accelerate the stratification of participation. Those women who have lower salaries and less discretionary income may suffer participation setbacks. To embrace all women into sport and offer them equal opportunities, a network for women's sport, linking governmental, voluntary and commercial sectors, needs to be established. This means an effort to create a better sporting environment for women is required.

This original research has explored the interrelationship of urbanisation, Chinese women and their sports participation since the 1980s. It argues that urbanisation, as a powerful economic and cultural force, has changed Chinese society and has fundamentally transformed Chinese women's sport for ever. The research will make a

contribution to Chinese studies, women's studies and sports studies. As sport has become a significant phenomenon in Chinese society in the 21st century, research on Chinese women's sport at grassroots level is required. My research on Chinese women's sport on the grassroots level is just a beginning. I will continue my research on how the government, voluntary organisations and commercial sectors can work together to form a network of supporting systems for women's sport in China.

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Appendix A

Letter to Managers of Fitness Clubs, Directors of Mass Sport Departments and the Director of the National Athletes Training Centre

Date:

Dear Managers/Directors,

I am writing to request your assistance in a research project about urbanisation and the transformation of Chinese women's sports participation in the post-Mao era. This project will form the basis of my PhD thesis at De Montfort University in the UK.

I would be very grateful if you could be willing to participate in the study by accepting an interview and providing some relevant documents. The potential benefits from this study include enhancing understanding of the Chinese urbanisation and its impact on women's participation in sport, further, exploring the relationship between women's sport and women's social status in the reformation era, eventually exploring women's emancipation and gender relations in the process of urbanisation, which may influence policy-based decisions to women's sport in China.

I would hope to develop some understanding of the above questions by conducting some interviews in your fitness club/community/centre. I hope that this proposal is of interest to you and would request you to recommend suitable subjects in your club/community/centre. I will follow up this letter with a telephone call in one week to answer any questions you have and to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely

Huan Xiong
PhD Student

致健身俱乐部经理，大众体育部门主管和国家训练局领导的信

尊敬的经理/主任：

我写这封信的目的是请求您对‘中国妇女在城市化进程中体育参与的转变’这一研究课题的帮助。这一研究是我在英国德蒙福特大学撰写的博士论文的基础。

如果您能愿意接受我的采访并能提供一些相关材料我将不甚感激。这项研究的潜在收益体现在推进对中国城市化进程和对妇女体育参与的影响的理解和认识，进而研究在改革时期女性体育和女性社会地位的关系，最后探讨在城市化进程中女性解放问题。此研究将对中国妇女体育政策决策产生影响。

我希望通过在您所在的健身俱乐部/社区/运动队的实地采访来推进我对上述问题的进一步理解。我希望您对我的上述建议感兴趣并能推荐在你所辖俱乐部/社区/运动队内合适的采访对象。我将在您收到此信后一周内与您电话联系并希望能安排一次面谈的机会。

此致

敬礼！

熊欢
博士生

日期：

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

School of Education and Contemporary Studies
De Montfort University

‘Urbanisation and the Transformation of Chinese Women’s Sports
Participation in the Post-Mao era’

Researcher: Huan Xiong

Supervisor: Professor Fan Hong; Dr Keith Sharp

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Please take a few moments to read the following information. If you are in an agreement, please sign below. If you have any questions, please feel free to raise them with me.

To participate, you will be interviewed. Interviews will be transcribed. If you do not want to participate, that is okay, you have the right not to participate. You also can stop at any time if you do not want to finish the study, just let me know when you are ready to stop.

I will make my results available to you when I complete my study. If you are interested in this research, please contact me at hxiong@dmu.ac.uk or contact my adviser at fanhong@dmu.ac.uk. You can also contact us if you have questions about the study you have participated.

If you have read and understood these instructions, and you do not have any questions about them, please sign your name below. If you do not understand these instructions, or you have questions about them that you want to answer, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I _____ agree to participate in the above research project being conducted by Huan Xiong into 'Urbanisation and the Transformation of Chinese Women's Sports Participation in the Post-Mao Era'. I agree to be interviewed by the researcher and understand that the interviews will be transcribed.

I also understand that:

1. I may withdraw from the study at any point. My participation in this study will not affect my relationship with other sports participants, my family relationships, and my post in my workplace.
2. I will be assigned a number for my data and my data will be kept separately from this consent form. From then on I will be known only by my number. This will prevent anyone else from obtaining knowledge of my information. Therefore, all data will be anonymous.
3. All answers will be kept confidential. That is, once the data are processed, it will be electronically stored and protected by the researcher. The results will be aggregated, and if the study is publicly disseminated (e.g. published), it will not be possible to identify me or anyone else who participated in the study.

Signed

_____ Participant _____ Date

_____ Researcher _____ Date

Participant's Number _____

同意确认书

德蒙福特大学
教育与当代研究学院

研究课题：城市化进程中中国妇女体育参与的转变

研究人：熊欢
博士生导师：凡红教授，凯斯夏普博士

谢谢你同意参与这次采访。请在百忙中阅读下列内容。如无异议请签名，如有任何问题请直接与我联系。

您在参与后我将会择机采访您，采访内容将会以文字方式记录下来。您有权利不参与，您也可以在任何时间停止这项研究。如果您想停止这项研究，请及时向我告知。

在我完成博士生论文后我的研究成果将告知与您。如果您对此感兴趣，请通过我的电子信箱：hxing@dmu.ac.uk 或我的导师的电子信箱 fanhong@dmu.ac.uk 与我们联系。如果你对你所参与的研究有任何问题，请与我们联系。

如果你已经阅读并理解这些要求，如无任何问题请在下面签字。如果你不理解这些要求或者有何问题，请与我直接联系。

我-----同意参与这项由熊欢负责的研究课题‘城市化进程中中国妇女体育参与的转变（1980-2000）’。我同意接受课题研究者的采访并知晓采访内容将以文字的方式记录下来。

我同时知晓：

- 第一，我可以随时退出这项研究。我参与的这项研究将不会影响我与其他体育参与者，与我的家人以及与我的工作岗位的关系。
- 第二，我将会被分配一个的唯一的号码，我的数据将与此项同意确认书分开保存。从现在起我的代码是可以识别我的唯一方式。这将防止其他人获取到我的信息。因此，任何数据将是匿名的。
- 第三，所有回答的信息将会保密。也就是说，一旦数据被处理后，将由研究者以电子文档的方式保存和保护。这些研究结果将会累积起来。如果这项研究将公开传播（如出版），我和参与这项研究的其他任何人将不会被识别。

签字：-----

参与者：----- 日期：-----

研究者：----- 日期：-----

参与者号码：-----

Appendix C

Interview Questions Guide

1 Opening Questions:

- 1.1 How old are you?
- 1.2 What do you do?
- 1.3 Have you married?
- 1.4 Do you have children?

2 General Questions:

- 2.1 How often do you participate in sport?
- 2.2 Why do you take part in sports activity?
- 2.3 Where do you normally exercise?
- 2.4 Why do you choose the park /neighbourhood/ fitness club to take part in sport?
- 2.5 What is your favorite sport?
- 2.6 Why do you choose this specific sports activity?
- 2.7 Do you enjoy the process of sports participation?

3 Specific Questions about the Transformation of Sport in Women's Life:

- 3.1 How do you get access to participate in sport?
- 3.2 Do you spend money on sport? If you do, how much do you normally pay?
- 3.3 Do you think it is worthy to spend money on sport?
- 3.4 What is your living track and what kind of roles does sport play in your life?
- 3.5 Compare to other leisure activities, what do you think the special characteristics of sports activities are in your life?
- 3.6 What do you think the differences of sports participation before and after the economic reform?

4 Specific Questions about the Obstacles and Limitations in Women's Sports Participation

- 4.1 What are the obstacles in your sports participation? How do you handle them?
- 4.2 Did the income affect your choices of sports activities?
- 4.3 Did the domestic affairs affect your sports participation?
- 4.4 Did the education affect your sports participation?
- 4.5 What is the limitation you are facing when taking part in sport?

5 Specific Questions about Sport, Body (health and beauty) and Self-realisation.

- 5.1 What kinds of women's appearance do you prefer, muscular, feminine, modern or traditional? Why?
Or
What kinds of image do you want to achieve through exercises? Why?

5.2 How do you think the meanings of a fit and beautiful body to Chinese women?

6 Specific Questions about Masculine Bias in Sport

6.1 In your opinion, what are the differences between women's sports activities and men's?

6.2 If you were a man, which sport would you want to participate in?

6.3 Compare with men, what do you think are the factors limited women's sports participation?

访问提纲

1 基本情况了解

1.1 年龄

1.2 职业

1.3 婚姻状况

1.4 子女情况

2 一般问题

2.1 一周参加几次体育活动?

2.2 为什么参加体育活动?

2.3 你平常在哪里做运动?

2.4 你为什么选择在公园/居民小区/健身俱乐部做运动?

2.5 你最喜欢参加的体育活动是什么?

2.6 你为什么喜欢这项运动?

2.7 你享受运动的过程吗?

3 体育活动在女性生活中扮演角色的转变:

3.1 你是如何开始参加体育活动的?

3.2 你花钱参加体育活动吗? 如果是, 一般你花多少钱一个月?

3.3 你认为花钱参加锻炼值得吗?

3.4 你一天的生活轨迹是什么? 体育锻炼在你生活中扮演什么角色?

3.5 和其他休闲活动比较, 你觉得体育活动的特点是什么? 它有什么特殊的好处?

3.6 你认为现在体育活动的形式与改革开放前有什么样的区别?

4 体育活动参与中的矛盾, 困惑, 障碍与局限性:

4.1 在你参加体育活动中, 你认为最大的障碍是什么? 你是怎么来处理的?

4.2 你认为你的收入会影响你的体育活动吗?

- 4.3 你认为家庭负担会影响体育参与吗？
- 4.4 你认为教育水平会影响你的体育参与吗？
- 4.5 在你参加体育运动的过程中是否有感到局限与困惑？如果有，是什么？

5 运动，身体与自我塑造：

- 5.1 你喜欢的女性形象是男性化还是女性化，现代还是传统的？为什么？
或
- 5.3 你想通过体育锻炼把自己塑造成什么样的形象？强壮的，性感的，健康的，还是柔弱的和苗条的？为什么？
- 5.1 你如何理解健康、美丽对女性的意义？

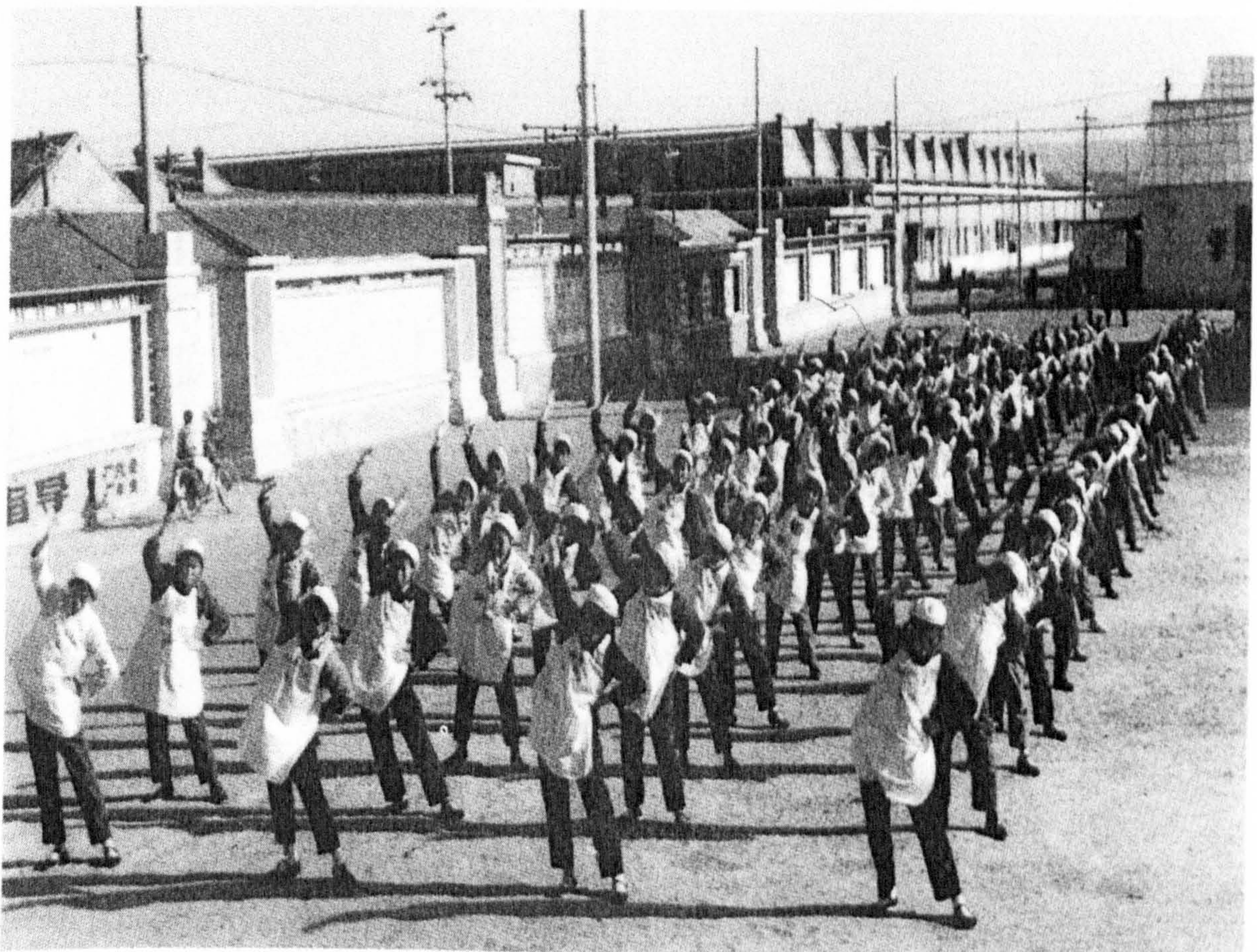
6 体育中的男性主义偏见：

- 6.1 在你的观念中，男性体育与女性体育有什么样的区别？
- 6.2 如果你是男性，你会喜欢参加什么样的体育运动？为什么？
- 6.3 和男性相比，你认为女性参加体育运动的限制因素是什么？抛开这些因素，你会如何发展自己？

Appendix D

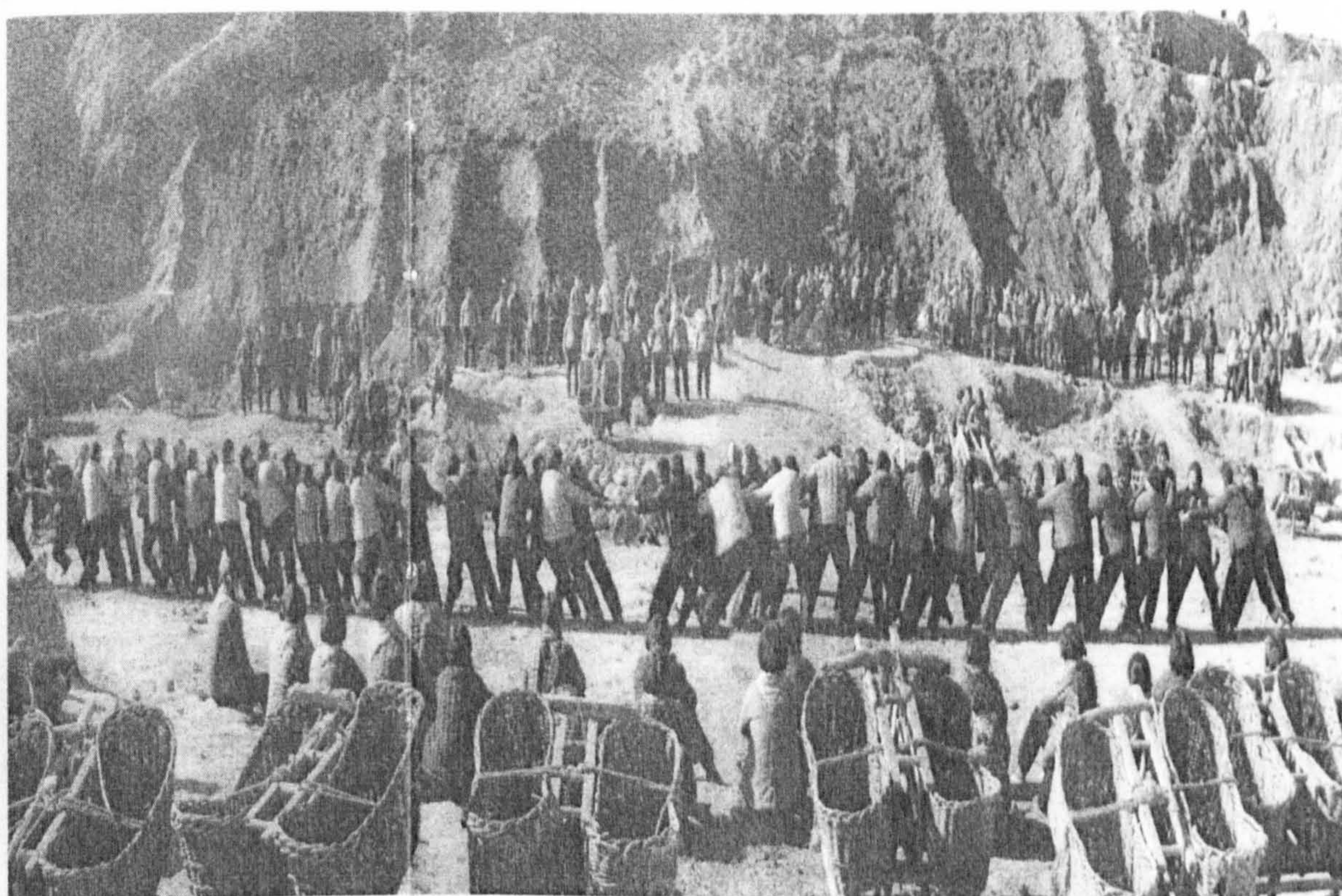
Photos

Photo 1: Morning Exercises in a Factory in the 1950s



Source: Shanxi Sports Committee, 1999

Photo 2: *Bahe* Competition in a Coal Mine in the 1960s



Note: *Bahe* is a traditional Chinese game.
Source: Chinese Olympic Committee, 1996

Photo 3: Rope Skipping in which Three Generations Participated in the 1970s



Source: Shanxi Sport Commission, 1999

Photo 4: Women Dance *Yange* in a Community Sports Meeting in 2001



Source: Mass Sport Management Department of CGAS, 2001

Photo 5: Family Sports Meeting in a Neighbourhood of Shanghai in 1997



Source: Shanghai Sports Commission, 1999

Photo 6: Shanghai Morning: Women Exercise on the Shanghai Beach in 1999



Source: Shanghai Sports Commission, 1999

**Photo 7: Women Exercise *Taiji* Dance
at the Foot of the Great Wall in 2000**



Source: Mass Sport Department of CGAS, 2001

Photo 8: Playing Badminton in Another Way in 2003



Resource: Taken by the researcher in Longtan Park Beijing, 2003

Photo 9: Exercise in Fitness Paths in New Resident District in 2005



Source: Taken by the researcher in Beijing, 2005

Photo 10: Exercise in a Central Park in 2004



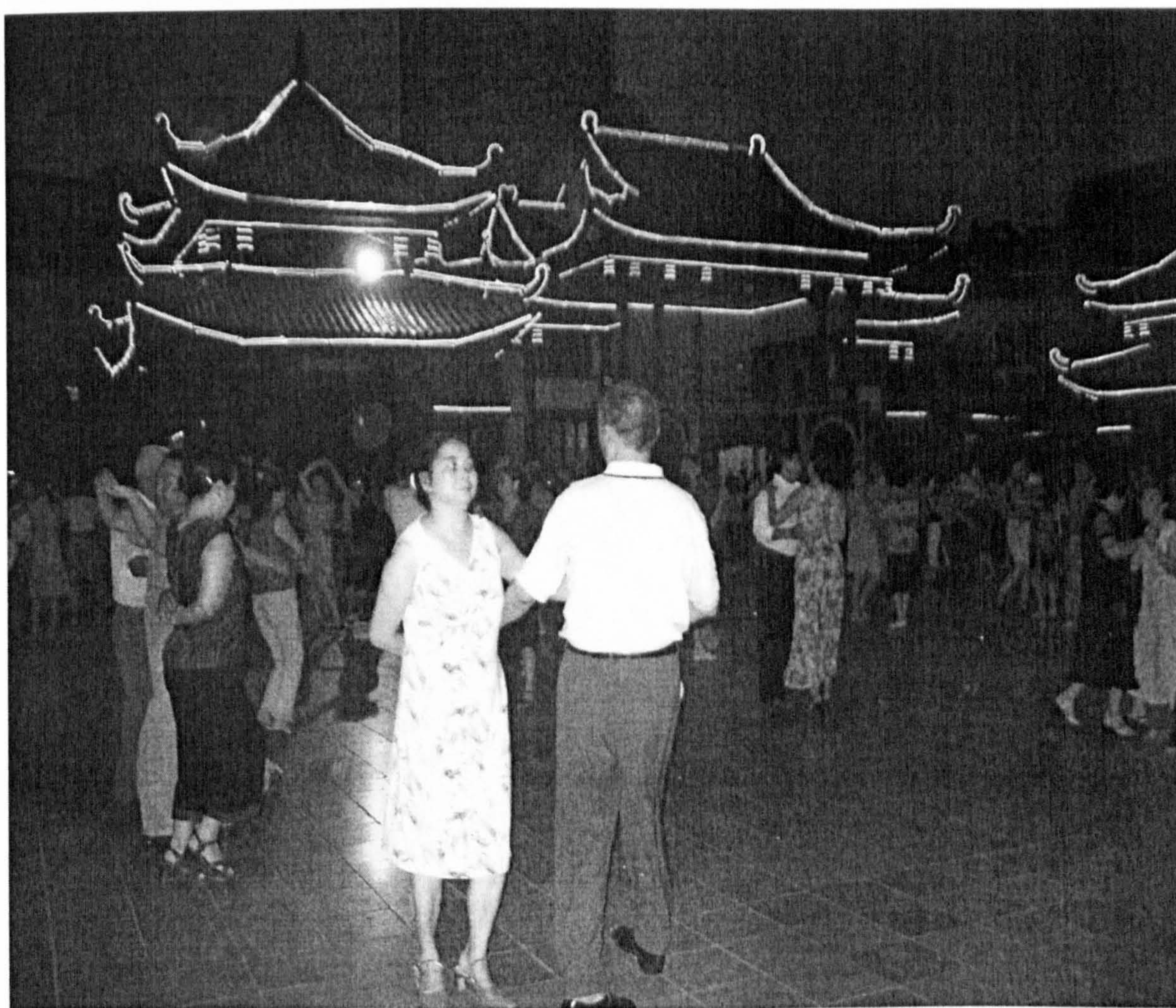
Source: Taken by the researcher in the People's Park Mianyang, 2004

Photo 11: Learning Chinese Traditional Fan Dance in a Park in 2004



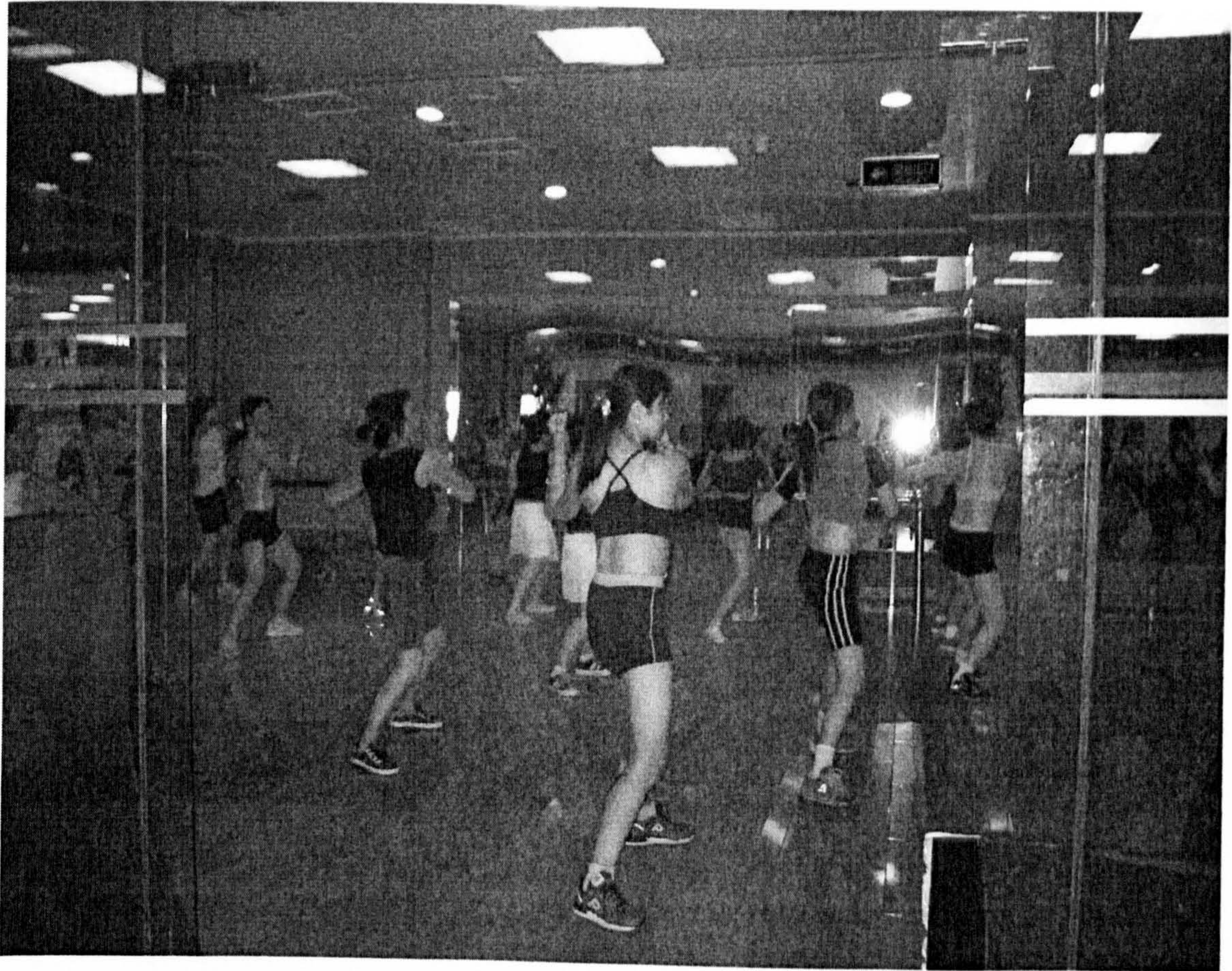
Source: Taken by the researcher in the People's Park in Mianyang, 2004

Photo 12: Happy Evening: Dancing in a Square in 2004



Source: Taken by the researcher in River Square in Mianyang, 2004

Photo 13: Aerobics in a Fitness Club in 2004



Source: Taken by the researcher in *Xinlida* Fitness Club in Mianyang, 2004